

JUDAISM

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Hitler: A Clue to History

Cuthbert Carson Mann

Process and Pluralism in Conservative Judaism

Robert Gordis

Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik

Michael Oppenheim

The Rabbinic Ban on Conversion in Argentina

Moshe Zemer

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Issue No. 145 / Volume 37 / Number 1 / Winter 1988

<i>The First Reader</i>	R.G.	3
<i>Hitler: A Clue to History</i>	CUTHBERT CARSON MANN	9
<i>Apologia For My Judaism</i>	BENJAMIN KOVITZ	22
<i>Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik</i>	MICHAEL OPPENHEIM	29
<i>Ahab in Bible and Talmud</i>	NAHUM M. WALDMAN	41
<i>Process and Pluralism in Conservative Judaism</i>	ROBERT GORDIS	48
<i>In Observance (poem)</i>	ROLAND TROPE	59
<i>Joseph and His Brothers: A Paradigm for Repentance</i>	SOL SCHIMMEL	60
<i>Hymn of Glory</i>		66
<i>Poetry and Pietism: The "Hymn of Glory"</i>	ISMAR SCHORSCH	67
<i>O God of Vengeance, Appear!</i>	ERIC L. FRIEDLAND	73
<i>Lilith (poem)</i>	JAYSETH GUBERMAN	80
<i>Isaac's Blindness: A Medical Diagnosis</i>	S. LEVIN	81
<i>The Rabbinic Ban on Conversion in Argentina</i>	MOSHE ZEMER	84
<i>An Unrecognized Part of the Human Anatomy</i>	MARC ROZELAAR	97
<i>Sparks (poem)</i>	DAVID SPARENBERG	102
<i>"Conspicuous Consumption" at Jewish Functions</i>	ARYEH SPERO	103
<i>Four Writers Look at Israel</i>		
<i>Review-Essay on The Other Walls: The Politics of the Arab-Israel Peace Process</i>		
by Harold H. Saunders		
<i>Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter's Notebook</i>		
by Wolf Blitzer		
<i>Israel's Lebanon War</i>		
by Ze'ev Schiff & Ehud Ya'ari		
and		
<i>Israel the Partitioned State: A Political History Since 1900</i>		
by Amos Perlmutter	RAPHAEL DANZIGER	111

REVIEWS

<i>Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through The Middle Ages</i>		
ed. by Arthur Green	HOWARD A. ADDISON	121
<i>The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew</i>		
by Phillip Sigal	GERARD S. SLOYAN	122
BOOKS RECEIVED		125

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Hitler Was Single-Minded

The Second World War had barely ended when the revelations of the grisly horror of the concentration camps and the crematoria, the firing squads and the “medical research laboratories” began to come to light. Almost immediately a far-flung campaign was launched to deny the bloody realities of the Nazi atrocities and, when that was impossible, to minimize or trivialize them.

A major objective of many of these falsifiers of history has been to rehabilitate Adolf Hitler either by declaring that he never gave orders for the genocide of the Jewish people, or, failing that maneuver, to argue that Hitler was merely an expression of the times, a passive instrument in history, no more responsible for the events that took place than a clock winder may be held accountable for the passing of the hours.

In his essay, “Hitler: A Clue to History,” *Cuthbert Carson Mann* refutes these rehabilitators of Hitler, whose ranks include some otherwise respected scholars. Mann clearly demonstrates that throughout his life Hitler had in mind the “final solution” to “the Jewish problem.” Though he adopted various measures during his career, his real intention, which can be documented long before his rise to power, was the extermination of the Jewish people. The author offers convincing proof that “Nazism did not give rise to antisemitism, but was its evil offspring,” using elements of nationalism and socialism to achieve its ultimate goal.

The essay then turns to the three traditions, the Hebraic, the Greek and the Roman that entered into Western civilization and, not without tensions, helped lay its foundations to the present day.

The author concludes that Hitler will be permanently defeated only when the world recognizes the historic significance of Judaism and the Jewish people for humanity as a whole.

What I Believe

In the mass of competing ideologies trumpeted about today in the Jewish marketplace by various movements and institutions, it is easy to

4 : *Judaism*

forget that, in the final analysis, every world-view, whether religious or secular, is an individual act of faith, the reaction of a human being confronting the riddle and the pain of existence.

In his essay, "Apologia For My Judaism," *Benjamin Kovitz* displays a high regard for traditional faith-structures like that of Orthodoxy which he approaches with sympathy, candor and in an ironic spirit all too rare today. Nevertheless, he upholds his right to disagree as he sets down his own attitude toward life and its moral component.

Great Religious Thinkers

Two of the most influential religious thinkers of modern times are the Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, and J.B. Soloveitchik. Emanating from two distinct religious traditions, these existentialist thinkers share many elements in common, though there are significant differences as well.

The basic elements of their world-view are analyzed by *Michael Oppenheim* in his paper, "Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik."

Ahab: Pro and Con

While rabbinic Judaism is an organic development of the earlier, biblical stage, it is by no means identical with it. The vast structure of rabbinic law grew out of the relatively brief legal sections in the Torah. In many respects, as the Rabbis themselves recognized, the Halakhah may be described as "mountains hanging by a hair."

Not only the Halakhah, but the Aggadah of the Talmud and Midrash often exhibit radical divergences from the biblical prototype.

Thus, when read without preconceptions, the Book of Genesis presents a basically sympathetic picture of Esau, while Jacob, particularly in his earlier years, is much less attractive. These roles are drastically reversed in rabbinic literature, Esau becoming a symbol of tyrannical Rome, the arch-enemy of Israel.

Another striking illustration of the radical divergence of view is presented by *Nahum M. Waldman* in his paper, "Ahab in Bible and Talmud." In the Bible, Ahab, who together with his wife Jezebel, ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel, is pictured in the blackest colors, his wickedness being relieved only by his weakness of character. The Rabbis, on the other hand, are much less hostile to him.

What is particularly striking is that their positive evaluation is supported by modern archeology. Excavations at Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel and at other sites, reveal Ahab as a capable and energetic ruler. Thus, modern research offers support for the rabbinic view of the Israelite king, rather than for the biblical portrait.

The Strength of Conservative Judaism

In the religious spectrum, Conservative Judaism occupies a center position between Orthodoxy and Reform, as it seeks to unite loyalty to tradition with a responsiveness to the needs of modernity. While it continues to be the choice of the largest number of religiously affiliated Jews on this continent, it is exposed to challenges both from its "sister movements" as well as from within its own ranks. Does it possess a consistent philosophy capable of meeting the major problems of the age? Is there a discernible direction? On the other hand, should Conservative Judaism preserve the variety of attitudes within its ranks that has played so significant a role in its extraordinary growth? Must it choose between pluralism and process?

In his paper, "Pluralism and Process in Conservative Judaism," *Robert Gordis* maintains that, far from being irreconcilable opposites, both attributes are essential attributes of a vital movement. When each is understood and afforded proper scope, both contribute to the never-ending task of preserving the tradition of the past in the context of life in the present.

Repentance Is Always Possible

The centrality of repentance in Jewish religious life is not often fully recognized though it may be demonstrated in almost mathematical terms. The period of repentance in the Jewish calendar is not limited to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur or even to the Ten Days of Penitence linking those two festivals. The theme of self-examination and moral regeneration is ushered in on Rosh Hodesh Elul, a month before Rosh Hashanah, when the daily blowing of the shofar at the morning service begins. It continues beyond Yom Kippur for another week until Hoshanah Rabbah, the seventh day of Succot, when, according to Jewish tradition, final judgment is pronounced in the heavenly court. In other words, repentance is the dominant motif of Jewish religious consciousness for seven out of fifty-two weeks each year, in addition to its presence in the liturgy all year round.

This fundamental concept is analyzed by *Sol Schimmel* in "Joseph and his Brothers: A Paradigm for Repentance." The author sheds new light on the biblical account and deepens our appreciation of what Tolstoy called the greatest narrative in the world, revealing still more facets of a fundamental religious experience.

The Hymn of Glory

Conventional wisdom has it that position in life is everything. A case in point is afforded by the *Alenu* prayer which is recited at the conclusion of each service three times a day, in addition to the High Holy days. Solo-

6 : *Judaism*

mon Schechter described it as “the Marseillaise of the Jewish spirit,” the matchless expression of the ideals that Judaism upholds both for the Jewish people and for humanity. Coming, however, at the conclusion of the daily service, it tends to be rattled off by the worshipper and its significant content is all but ignored.

Another instance may be found in *Anim Zemirot*, “The Hymn of Glory,” which is chanted at the end of the Sabbath morning service. The deep religious sensibility and high literary art of this poem, emanating from early medieval Hasidic circles in Germany (not to be confused with the East European Hasidism of modern times), is highlighted by *Ismar Schorsch* in his paper, “Poetry and Pietism: The Hymn of Glory.” It is to be hoped that his essay will revive interest in this masterpiece.

The paper is accompanied by an English version of *Anim Zemirot*, the work of Jules Harlow, editor of the recently published prayer book, *Sim Shalom*.

Vengeance in the Prayerbook

When is a molehill worthy of attention? When it gives signs of growing into a mountain! Ever since Freud, we have learned the importance of minor acts and subtle changes in language as pointing to fundamentals in human life.

In his paper, “O God of Vengeance, Appear!” *Eric L. Friedland* calls attention to the reintroduction of the theme of vengeance in the text and translations of various modern prayer books. His research suggests that a change has taken place in the temper and outlook of contemporary Jews during the decades since the Holocaust, and not necessarily for the better.

Why Isaac Couldn't See

The facets of interest in the Bible are literally inexhaustible and even a chance phrase or a minor incident can become the source of a rich and interesting development in later Jewish life and thought.

Thus the Bible makes a brief reference to the blindness of the patriarch Isaac. A modern medical expert, *Dr. S. Levin*, raises the question as to the nature of Isaac's malady and, in “Isaac's Blindness: A Medical Diagnosis,” he offers an explanation which is both interesting and persuasive.

Conversion in Argentina

Since, in the felicitous phrase of the great historian, Simon Dubnow, Jews constitute “a world people,” many Jewish communities tend to be neglected and many incidents are overlooked. Argentinian Jewry is a case in point.

After the outbreak of massive persecution of the Jews in the Czarist

empire, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a vast tide of East European emigration flowed out of Russia. One of the significant areas of settlement was Argentina, where Jews came in substantial numbers. The full history of this community, which has some less attractive aspects as well, still remains to be written.

An interesting episode, with implications for our day, is the subject of *Moshe Zemer's* paper, "The Rabbinic Ban on Conversion in Argentina." It is reassuring to know that we Jews today are not always worse than earlier generations.

What Does The Word Mean?

When the miracle of the rebirth of Hebrew as a modern language took place, lexicographers and other scholars combed the pages of biblical and post-biblical literature in order to find the necessary vocabulary. In many cases where words were infrequent in the classical sources and, therefore, not always correctly understood, they adopted the traditional interpretation offered by the commentators. Thus, the noun, *raqqáh*, which occurs only twice in biblical Hebrew, has entered modern Hebrew as referring to the "temple" of the head.

In his paper, "An Unrecognized Part of the Human Anatomy," *Marc Rozelaar* argues persuasively that this meaning of the noun cannot be correct, because it is inappropriate for the contexts in which it occurs. He suggests another meaning which is much more suitable, and one that the Editor finds totally convincing.

It is not, of course, to be expected that the well-established "traditional" usage, though it rests upon a misunderstanding of the text, will be easily surrendered. However, the essay is to be welcomed, because it adds to our understanding and appreciation of the biblical passages involved.

When Less is Better

Throughout the ages moralists have lamented and castigated the practice of what Thorstein Veblen has called "conspicuous consumption" as practiced by the wealthier segments in society. In contemporary Jewish life, ostentation, extravagance and vulgar display have frequently been remarked upon by outside observers as proving that Jews are like other people, only more so.

At times, the defense offered for these displays at Bar Mitzvah and wedding receptions is that they are examples of the observance of *hiddur mizvah*, "the beautifying of the commandments." In his paper, "'Conspicuous Consumption' at Jewish Functions," *Aryeh Spero* discusses the questionable practice. Drawing upon past Jewish experience he suggests that Jewish leadership has resources in the halakhah for curbing the impulse.

The Fall 1987 issue of JUDAISM presented our readers with five different “blueprints” of the future of the State of Israel. That is a measure of the central significance — and we shall not quarrel regarding the precise geometric figure that is to be chosen as a paradigm — that Israel occupies in the consciousness and the conscience of Jews both in the homeland and the Diaspora.

In a review-essay, “Four Writers Look at Israel,” *Raphael Danziger* analyzes some recent volumes that trace the political history of the State and its role in the Middle East. The discussion of these widely different views can redound only to the health and vigor of the State and the Jewish people, if it is carried on in a spirit of rational analysis, urbanity and mutual respect. To attain this attitude it helps to remember the great utterance of Justice Learned Hand: “The spirit of liberty is the spirit that is never quite sure it is right.”

R.G.

Hitler: A Clue to History

CUTHBERT CARSON MANN

MORE THAN FORTY YEARS AFTER HITLER'S suicide in his Berlin bunker, monumental research has so far failed to uncover written orders that would directly implicate him in the Holocaust. This has led some historians to suggest that the extermination of six million Jews was but the logical outcome of the Nazi ideology that Hitler created. Or, as David Irving so scandalously asserts, that the Holocaust was partly an "*ad hoc* affair,"¹ conducted on the one hand by middle-level authorities as a way out of a dilemma and, on the other, by SS officials as a "cynical extrapolation"² of Hitler's anti-Semitic decrees. Thus, Hitler emerges as a mere clockwinder who had nothing to do with the clock striking the hours.

Either view implies an element of autonomy that tends to let Hitler posthumously off the hook because of the failure to find the documentary equivalent of "the smoking gun." The reason for this, it is more than charitable to assume, is that in an effort to determine Hitler's post-Nuremberg guilt or innocence, some historians have taken a too narrowly judicial approach to history in which there has been an imbalance between the consideration of facts and of motive. This has had the effect of blocking an understanding of the unprecedented phenomenon of the symbiosis of Nazism and anti-Semitism that was Hitler's demonic achievement. It also reflects a failure to understand the prophetic character of Hitler's thought and its cultural-psychological makeup which, I believe, makes this Jew-hater *par excellence* the most important clue to history that has yet been disgorged.

By "prophetic" I do not mean that Hitler had some mysterious precience, but, rather, that he had formulated an intention and knew what he wanted to do without knowing the precise methods to be used. From the beginning of his political career, his *modus operandi* was to decide upon a course of action and then to find ways of carrying it out. The end was ever in sight; only the means had to be worked out.

A quarter of a century ago, British historian Martin D'Arcy noted that when

the future historian has to consider the mass of material bearing on Nazism he will see better than its contemporaries the interconnectedness of much of

1. David Irving, *Hitler's War* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), Vol. 1, p. xiv.

2. Ibid.

CUTHBERT CARSON MANN was, for eighteen years, on the editorial staff of the *Los Angeles Times*. He now writes on history and literature.

it, and how the moves of Hitler, which led to such different interpretations at the time, manifest his mind and his intentions.³

Thus, a proper appreciation of Hitler's intentions makes written documentation of his involvement in the Holocaust desirable, but not essential, and shows that, before the bar of history, he is, beyond a reasonable doubt, guilty as charged.

His own statements make clear the intentional mode of his thought. "I do not look for people having clear ideas of their own," he said, "but rather people who are clever in finding ways and means of carrying out my ideas."⁴ And because he had an overriding intention, some European statesmen found it difficult to understand Hitler's policies. His principal concerns were not with balance of powers, European hegemony, preservation of vital interests — the usual stuff of European statecraft — but with world revolution aimed at the overthrow of what he perceived to be the growing world dominance of Jewry.

Traditional diplomacy was useful to Germany only if it furthered Hitler's intention. And rather than being a predictable "traditional statesman,"⁵ as historian A.J.P. Taylor so incredibly described him after World War II, Hitler destroyed the German state and made a mockery of international diplomacy.

To Hitler, the state was not an end but a means, and this conformed with his intentional mode of operation. It in no way reflected the view of a "traditional statesman" that Taylor described as being "too absorbed by events to follow a preconceived plan." Such traditionalists, Taylor added, "take one step, and the next follows from it."⁶ This is totally at variance with Hitler's own description of what he was about as well as what he actually did and how he did it. He made the telling distinction between business-as-usual politics and revolutionary politics. Political parties, he said,

are always ready to compromise; world theories never are. Political parties bargain with their opponents; world theories proclaim that they are infallible. (And even more emphatically, he said): Whereas the program of a party, which is merely political, is the recipe for getting good results from a forthcoming election, that of a world theory is equivalent to a declaration of war on the existing order of things, in fact, against an accepted view of life.⁷

On the occasion when Otto Strasser, an early National Socialist cohort, told him that he was mistaken, Hitler asserted: "I cannot be mistaken. What I do and say is historical."⁸ Or, as he wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

3. Martin C. D'Arcy, *The Meaning and Matter of History* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1961), p. 51

4. Heinrich Hoffman, *Hitler, Wie ihn keiner kennt* (Berlin, 1932), pp. x-xiv.

5. A.J.P. Taylor, "Hitler: A 'Traditional' German Statesman," in *European Problem Studies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 93-107.

6. Ibid.

7. Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd., 1938), p. 182.

8. Walter L. Langer, *The Mind of Adolph Hitler* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1972), p. 32.

Some one man proclaims some true thing, appeals for *solution* of some definite *problem*, marks out an *objective*, and creates a Movement having as its aim the realization of his intentions. This is how a union or a Party is founded whose program is aimed either at *removing* existing evils or attaining a definite condition of things at some future period.”⁹ (Italics mine)

“Solution,” “problem,” “objective,” and “removing” were buzz words for his anti-Semitic intention, and they became less euphemistic as his career advanced and he came closer to achieving his intention. Then the “problem,” which, to Hitler, had always been the Jewish “problem,” required a “final objective” or “final solution” by “removal,” i.e., extermination.

It has often been said, and rightly, that, initially, Hitler’s anti-Semitism did not much differ from the current or vulgar anti-Semitism pervading Austria and Germany before he became politically active, but that it took on new dimensions when, instead of mere verbalizing, he formulated an intention to implement his anti-Semitism. The gestation period of his intention appears to have extended from his years in Vienna (1908-1913) through his service in the Army from 1914-1919, and it was first put into motion when he joined the German Workers’ Party in September, 1919.

In considering the intentional nature of Hitler’s anti-Semitism, it is important to understand that an intention has three aspects: idea, will, and subject, made one in action. Often an intention is not evident to others because, due to time and circumstances, each act may exhibit that intention only partially. The scope of the intention is restricted by the given situation, and often involves other short-range intentions that serve the overriding long-range one. Nevertheless, the intention is spiritually complete in each act.

For example, it was in line with Hitler’s intention to defeat Russia, yet, when he signed the 1939 German-Soviet pact, it would seem that he had departed from that intention. That, of course, was not the case since the pact momentarily served his ultimate intention. In that light, such considerations as were given to the relocation of Jews in city ghettos, or in Madagascar, can be seen only as possible short-range intentions due to the circumstances of the time. The immediate and dramatic successes of Hitler’s war, however, advanced the implementation of his long-range intention to the point where it became necessary to carry out such short-range ones.

That Hitler’s long-range intention from the start was the extermination of the Jews is evident from his earliest declarations that the Jews were not just a German problem, but a world problem that had to be confronted in the manner of a war, and that his mission was to lead that war. He was aware that the fulfillment of his intention would depend, not only on his will, but upon circumstances, for, as he declared in *Mein Kampf*:

9. *Mein Kampf*, p. 203.

The National Socialist German Workers' Party undertakes to adapt the essential principles of a universal national world theory, and, having *due regard to practical possibilities, the times, and the supply of human material and its weaknesses*, to formulate from them a political creed which shall in time to come be the preliminary condition for the final triumph of that world theory once *such methods have made possible a rigid organization of great masses of people*.¹⁰ (Italics mine)

The abortive putsch of 1923 that had forced the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) to "divert from the straight course" and that landed Hitler in prison, had taught him that he must have "due regard to practical possibilities, the times and the supply of human material" as well as the need for a "rigid organization of great masses of people." This meant that he had to embark on the laborious and, for him, hateful task of taking part in democratic electioneering and parliamentarianism which, in his mind, were associated with his hated enemy, world Jewry. But, as with the later Nazi-Soviet pact, the political drive for power through electioneering was a necessary short-range intention that in no way signified his departure from his main one.

Three stages exhibited the development of Hitler's intention. These were his *mental struggle* in Vienna, his *political struggle* in Germany, and his *military struggle* throughout Europe, and the Jews were the focal point of all three. The political and military struggles were extensions into the external world of his mental struggle. As he acknowledged in a speech in 1940, "I am totally convinced that this struggle (the war) does not differ one hair's breadth from the battle which I once fought out within myself."¹¹

That mental struggle within himself is outlined in the much-quoted passage from *Mein Kampf* in which he describes how, as a young man, he had left his hometown of Linz, Austria, bound for Vienna, where, at first, he was offended by press attacks against the Jews. But, when he saw his first Jew in a caftan, he began to think more and more about Jews and to read anti-Semitic books and pamphlets. He then came to realize that the Jews were, among other things, the source of "denigration of all things German" and were the "leaders of social democracy."¹²

He related how the scales fell from his eyes and "my long mental struggle was at an end."¹³ Once this "mental struggle" had ended, Hitler abandoned his previous liberal-democratic tolerance and became a self-styled "fanatical anti-Semite."¹⁴ Since he had come to associate all things "liberal-democratic" with the Jewish spirit, he was, in effect, abandoning, or killing within his own mind the Jewish spirit that he, along with all Europeans, had inherited in its Christian form and the essence of which is

10. Ibid., pp. 150-151.

11. Robert G.L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1977), p. 449.

12. *Mein Kampf*, p. 33.

13. Ibid., p. 33.

14. Ibid., p. 35.

the moral conscience. From then on, Jew-hatred, or anti-Semitism, became the dynamic for all else that he did. But instead of directing his hatred only, or even primarily, at Christianity, he focused his attention on the Jews as the *corpus materiale* which validates the Christian *corpus mysticum*.

Having finally solved the Jewish "problem" in his mind, he subsequently sought to express that solution politically and, ultimately, as a final solution by the physical extermination of the Jews. His mind, sullied over as it were with the "pale cast of thought," moved to "take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them." Three things were necessary to do so:

1. The political party of his choice must not have anti-Semitism as just another plank in its platform, but must have it as its foundation.
2. The brand of anti-Semitism that the party exhibited must be one in which Jewry was emphatically regarded not as a religion, but as a race.
3. The party's anti-Semitism must be "rational" and not "emotional."

These were the pillars of Hitler's Nazism, and the third requirement was crucial, since, in his mind, all prior expressions of anti-Semitism had ended in emotional pogroms that provided only limited, or partial, solutions. A "rational" anti-Semitism was needed, therefore, that would be systematic, legal, and lead to a final solution. Perhaps more than anything else, this requirement is the most revelatory of Hitler's intentions since it points to what became a systematic attempt to achieve the "Final Solution."

To ensure that his intention would be carried out strictly in accordance with his requirements, it was necessary for Hitler to have a party over which he had absolute control. For this reason he did not consider joining any of the mainline parties or, as he put it: "I had never imagined myself joining a ready-made party; I wanted to found one for myself."¹⁵ But after giving a spontaneous speech at a German Workers' Party meeting, Hitler was made a member. He felt that the GWP (later the NSDAP) was small enough and lacked sufficient organization so that "it was still possible to determine its character, objective and methods,"¹⁶ something that would have been "quite impossible in the case of the existing parties."¹⁷ Hitler regarded his joining this small party, in which he saw the potential for "national resurrection," as "the decisive turning point in my life."¹⁸ Until then "the greatest change" that he had ever experienced in his life was when he gained knowledge of "the Jewish question" that had ended his long "mental struggle." That struggle marked the formulation of his intention, just as his joining of the GWP signified the beginning of his political struggle to implement it.

15. Ibid., p. 99.

16. Ibid., p. 100.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., pp. 100-101.

The three basic anti-Semitic points that Hitler demanded of his political party were fundamental to his intention and, as a package, differentiated his anti-Semitism from all of its historical precursors, making it a veritable trap that he would spring on Europe's Jews, first in Germany with political and "legal" methods and, finally, with physical extermination. For this, the military operations served as a bulldozer, clearing new territories of human "debris," his much-vaunted *Lebensraum* becoming, in effect, *Tötungsraum*, or killing space. No plans were made for the movement of "Aryan" Germans to newly-conquered territories, but carefully laid plans were set in motion for the relocation and extermination of millions of Jews. Indeed, many ethnic Germans, including Balts, were brought back to the Reich from conquered lands, often against their will.

Heinrich Himmler's appointment in 1929 as Reichsführer-SS doubtless was in preparation for the removal of Jews from Germany and their ultimate extermination after the Nazis gained power, for, soon after they achieved power, the SS Disposition Force was made, by Hitler's decree, into a standing armed force to be held at Hitler's "exclusive disposition"¹⁹ for whatever special internal tasks he might assign to it. This makes it unmistakably clear that the tasks which were carried out by the SS were not *ad hoc*, but were under the Fuehrer's direction even if this was given, not in writing, but orally. Himmler, a sort of Smerdyakovian figure, was, in effect, Hitler's executive arm for the "Final Solution," which probably accounts for Hitler's great shock when, towards the end of the war, he learned that his "*treurer* Heinrich" had put out peace feelers to Eisenhower. It is reported that he "raged like a madman" then sank "into a stupor,"²⁰ from which he later emerged by declaring that it was the worst act of treachery he had ever known.

In tracking the formulation of Hitler's intention, there are two statements that seem to me to be of great importance, not only because of what they say, but when they were said. One of these is the letter that he wrote from the Front on Feb. 5, 1915 to Ernest Hepp, an assistant judge in Munich, and the other is the report that he prepared on Sept. 16, 1919, for his Reichswehr superior in response to questions posed about Jewry by one Adolph Gemlich.

In the Hepp letter, Hitler describes how he and his army comrades wish that they might get a chance to

even scores with that crew, to get at them no matter what the cost, and that those of us who are lucky enough to return to the Fatherland, will find it a *purser place*, less riddled with *foreign* influences, so that the daily sacrifices and sufferings of hundreds of thousands of us and the torrent of blood that keeps flowing here day after day against an *international world of enemies* will

19. Hans Buchheim, "The Position of the SS in the Third Reich" from *Republika to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 277.

20. H. Trevor Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 169.

not only help to *smash* Germany's foes outside but our *inner internationalism*, too, will collapse . . .²¹ (Italics mine)

The Hepp letter contains, in general form, the basic ingredients that would be reiterated in *Mein Kampf*, in speeches, and in conversations throughout Hitler's life. "Purer place" incorporated his "master" or "pure race" notions, and "foreign influences," "international world of enemies" and "inner internationalism" were synonyms for Jewry in all its imagined forms, which he later set out to "smash" both inside and outside of Germany. Some of Hitler's comrades who were "lucky enough" to return to the Fatherland were among those who provided the storm-trooper nucleus for smashing Germany's internal foes.

In a much more succinct way the so-called Gemlich report encapsulated the intention that had been fermenting in Hitler's mind since his "mental struggle" in Vienna had ended. Since this report predated by six years the publication of the first volume of *Mein Kampf* in 1925, it shows that Hitler's intention had been clearly formulated by at least 1919. The Gemlich report contains his insistence that the Jews are a race and not a religion, as well as the distinction of "rational" as opposed to "emotional" anti-Semitism, both of which provided the diabolical "Catch-22" that would make it virtually impossible for Europe's Jews to escape the "Final Solution." These distinctions were substantially incorporated into the Twenty-Five Points of the National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1920, the year after the Gemlich report was written, and subsequently found expression in anti-Semitic decrees issued after the NSDAP had consolidated its power and, also, in the 1933 Enabling Act boycotting Jewish businesses. Thereafter, the 1935 Nuremberg (race) Laws (Hitler's gift to the party for winning Germany's freedom from its enemies) became the clearest expression of that "rational" anti-Semitism that Hitler saw as necessary to a "methodical and legal struggle"²² against the Jews. They also were a precursor to the "final objective" of removing the Jews entirely.

The Nuremberg Laws, and all the Nazi actions against the Jews that followed, were based on the Gemlich report distinction that "Jewry definitely describes a race, not a religious community."²³ Since race equalled blood, the Jews were manifestly not of German blood and, under the Nuremberg Laws, they became effectively dispossessed and disenfranchised, just as they would become in territories brought under German control. By making race the *only* determinant for being a German, Hitler rendered it impossible for Jews to become Germans, either through legal means, i.e., citizenship, or by conversion to Christianity, as had generally been allowed to Jews under various Christian persecutions, most notably

21. Werner Maser, *Hitler's Letters and Notes* (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1976), p. 88.

22. Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler* (New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1973), p. 131.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

in the Spain of the Inquisition. For, as he saw it, "If the worst came to the worst, a drop of holy water would always get them (the Jews) out of their troubles and preserve their Judaism at the same time."²⁴

This inability to use conversion as an escape factor, along with his massive extermination program, made Hitler's secular anti-Semitism more implacable than the historical Christian version. It is also worth noting that the perennial accusation by Christians that the Jews were "Christ-killers" was not a big feature of Nazi anti-Semitism which was also anti-Christian except where "Christianity" was subsumed by National Socialism, as was largely the case.

The other aspect of the Gemlich report that is of tantamount importance to an understanding of Hitler's intention is the emphasis that he put on anti-Semitism as a political movement, showing unmistakably that Nazism did not give rise to anti-Semitism but was its evil offspring. As Hitler expressed it:

... anti-Semitism very easily acquires the character of a mere manifestation of the emotions. And this is not as it should be. Anti-Semitism regarded *as a political movement*, should not and cannot be understood in emotional terms but only through a knowledge of the facts.²⁵ (Italics mine)

Then he distinguished between "purely emotional" anti-Semitism that finds its "final expression" in the form of pogroms, whereas rational anti-Semitism "must be directed toward a methodical and legal struggle" against the Jews, and:

Its *final aim* must be the *deliberate removal* of the Jews. Both (objectives) are only possible through a government of national strength, not a government of national impotence.²⁶ (Italics mine)

The foregoing quotations show the sense of limitation that Hitler found in "purely emotional" anti-Semitism that resulted in pogroms — an obviously partial solution — whereas rational anti-Semitism, when backed (as it subsequently was) by a government of "national strength," would lead to a "final aim" (read "Final Solution") in the "removal of the Jews." His thinking on these issues had been refined in Vienna by his studies of two Austrian political parties: the Pan-Germans of August Georg von Schonerer, and the Christian Socialist Movement of Karl Lueger.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler describes his attraction to Schonerer's Pan-Germans because their anti-Semitism "was based on a true appreciation of the racial problem and not on theories of religion."²⁷ And even though there were aspects of Lueger's Christian Socialist Movement that he admired, Hitler thought that Lueger did not really understand the Jewish "danger" because his anti-Semitism was based on a view of Jewry as a religion and not as a race.

24. *Mein Kampf*, p. 58.

25. *The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler*, p. 131.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Mein Kampf*, p. 59.

Years later, when Hitler became leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, he incorporated elements of Schönerer's Pan-Germans along with some of Lueger's socialist ideas, thus using both nationalism and socialism as a way of making possible "a rigid organization of great masses of people"²⁸ that would serve his anti-Semitic movement. Appealing as it did to the two major political currents in Germany, National Socialism became the host to Hitler's anti-Semitic political solution just as the Army would become host to the SS' execution of the "Final Solution." And these political and military hosts were but outward manifestations of Hitler's mind that had hosted anti-Semitism in the first place.

Thus Hitler's, at first generalized, intention to "destroy" or "smash" world Jewry became clarified in action. When he gained control of the NSDAP he gave expression to that intention in the party's Twenty-Five Points; when he achieved power, anti-Semitic decrees were promptly issued, and these were followed by the Enabling Act and Nuremberg Laws that provided a distorted legality for his anti-Semitic intention. When the Nuremberg Laws were enacted he said that they were an attempt to regulate a "problem that, in the event of repeated failure, would have to be transferred by law to the National Socialist Party for final solution."²⁹ These laws were really a step towards the "Final Solution," and were part of Hitler's war against the Jews that started within Germany's borders and was expanded to central and eastern Europe where the preponderance of Jews lived, and to Russia, whose Bolshevism, in Hitler's eyes, was the standard-bearer of world Jewry. Since the war was the vehicle for carrying out his "Final Solution," that solution was accelerated when it became clear that the war was lost. More than one writer has suggested that Hitler's "hold fast" military orders which he tried to impose on his generals were designed to facilitate as much of the "Final Solution" as the shortening time would allow, and there is ample evidence to support this idea.

Hitler had always preferred to call the NSDAP "the Movement" instead of "the Party," and for good reason. A party suggests a fixed, or static organization, but a movement indicates that there is a goal towards which one is moving. His "Movement" — an anti-Semitic political one — would remain a movement until the fulfillment of his intention of exterminating the Jews.

But if the Hitlerian intention to exterminate Europe's Jews originated in his mind after his "mental struggle" had ended in Vienna, it leaves unanswered the question: what was there in that mind that led to such an intention? The answer, I feel, does not belong in the area of Freudian psychology except in a very limited sense. Some attempts to provide

28. Ibid., p. 151.

29. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 69.

highly complex rationalizations in consciousness for Hitler's presumed unconscious dynamics are more fanciful than historical or psychological. As Isaiah Berlin has observed, conscious human choice comes into play in history more than it is "usually and complacently supposed,"³⁰ and he has also remarked on the tendency to "attribute too much to the unavoidable operations of natural and social laws such as the workings of the unconscious mind, or unalterable psychological reflexes . . ."³¹

Using a psychological approach to the Nazi era, some historians have not only allowed the Freudian writ to run, but to run away with them, and in so doing they have ignored very important cultural-psychological factors — an ignorance that, in itself, is of psychological interest.

There is, of course, a role for Freudian psychology in any consideration of Hitler, particularly when it encompasses childhood, or unconscious factors that are based on solid evidence which may have affected Hitler's emotional and mental disposition. But the disposition that led Hitler to hatred instead of love did, in fact, find expression through *given* cultural-psychological forms in however distorted ways, and particularly so since he was operating in the public arena.

Hitler shared with all Europeans a mentality that was cultivated through religion, education, tradition, and other influences. There is now more than sufficient scholarship to establish that the main elements in the cultivation of the European mind are of Jewish, Greek and Roman origin. Just as in ancient times individual Jews, Greeks and Romans would find it difficult to agree on life's fundamental issues, so these three cultural types are in perpetual confusion within the Western psyche as reflected in the neurosis of Western (now universal) political life. The Jewish spirit is marked by religious prophecy, the Greek by metaphysics, and the Roman by pragmatic jurisprudence, and the struggle for survival of each within the European psyche is demonstrated in the realm of politics.

It is easy enough to recognize these three elements as symbolically found in architecture, as we do in the innumerable public and church buildings throughout the Western world, some of which have Christian spires (one aspect of the Jewish spirit) superimposed, sometimes extraneously, it seems, on Greco-Roman structures. But it is much more difficult to discern them in our minds, since they do not always operate in their own separate ways but do so in a confused interplay. They are part of what Marx called the "world-historical necromancy"³² that brings us all into involuntary involvement in history. Or, to quote Isaiah Berlin again, we all inherit from our ancestors "ancient spectacles through which we are still looking."³³ One might add that, for Hitler, as for all Europeans,

30. Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981), p. 176.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

32. Karl Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1983), p. 288.

33. *Concepts and Categories*, p. 171.

these psychological spectacles were Jewish, Greek and Roman trifocals though he would have preferred that they be Greco-Roman bifocals tinted with Germanic mysticism.

Hitler's mind offers an opportunity to see, in exaggerated form, the tensions among these three antinomial constituents in the Western consciousness. For him, the Jewish spirit was evident in all things international such as finance, trade, social democracy, liberalism, communism, etc., and all of these he perceived to be antithetical to German nationalism and culture. The physical presence of the Jews became, for him, the embodiment of all forms of internationalism. What appears to have transpired, judging by his own account of his "mental struggle," was a sort of psychological provocative contradiction in which the more he was provoked by the Jewish spirit, the more his German nationalism was stimulated. Edmund Wilson noted this provocation in literature. "... the strong Hebrew strain in English," he said, "is to some extent a variance with the influence of the Greek and Roman tradition" and where there is an inclination towards the Greco-Roman tradition "one is likely to resent the other."³⁴ Matthew Arnold and other writers, including America's William Barrett, have written at length on these polarities, and George Eliot's *Romola* provides probably the best literary exploration of this disturbing psychological triumvirate. Even so, most writers, with the possible exception of Eliot, see these three cultural strains operating in society without pursuing them to their source within the psyche.

Hitler's psychological development took place in provincial Austria where he was exposed to Pan-German nationalism at a time when his ego was attempting to fasten on an identity. The chosen identity was as a German, and he latched on to it with the zeal that is often exhibited by naturalized citizens or converts to a new faith. He became a *super* German, evading the draft in Austria, but willingly accepting army service in Germany.

Hitler's efforts to identify himself as a German were greatly bolstered during World War I when he received the Iron Cross, both first and second class, a singular accomplishment for someone holding corporal's rank. But this triumphant reinforcement of his German nationality was dealt a great blow by the socialist revolution of 1918 that preceded Germany's humiliating surrender to the Allies. He saw the revolution and the defeat as being due to the Jewish "enemies" who were responsible for everything that worked against German nationalism and, therefore, against his own strong German identification. For Hitler, all internationalism represented a will-to-identify with humanity that ran counter to his will-to-identify with Germany.

As with all nationalisms, however, Hitler's was bound to find expres-

34. Edmund Wilson, *A Piece of My Mind* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), p. 88.

sion through the Western world's cultural legacy which, as previously noted, is predominantly Jewish, Greek and Roman. As he rightly sensed, the pressure in the Western world for a will-to-identify with humanity comes from the Judeo-Christian spirit. What was a source of hope for many in the Western world was, to Hitler, a "poison," so he fought back against this pressure and extolled, instead, the Greco-Roman elements of his consciousness. In so doing he was fulfilling an expression of German nationalism that had long been adumbrated by more than one German writer. Theodor Mommsen, 19th century Germany's premier Roman historian, for instance, saw in the growing German nationalism a resurrection of the Roman Republic, and it was also Mommsen who viewed the Jews as "the ferment and decomposition in peoples"³⁵ — a phrase that Hitler adopted for frequent use. Others, such as novelist William Raabe, said of Bismarck's Reich that "We (Germans) are now asked to become Romans and to surrender everything to the state."³⁶ And both Schlegel and Schiller saw 19th Century Germany as a new Greece or a new Rome, or a combination of the two.

Hitler's Third Reich quite blatantly took on many of the characteristics of Greece and Rome, as reflected in exaggerated sketches for public buildings and Nazi regalia. However, it was not the Greece of high reason and Athenian democracy that Hitler found attractive, but the folkish warrior-state of Sparta in which six thousand Helots were controlled by an elite few.

Despite his admiration and imitation of the classical world and the resurrection of some of its worst aspects while ignoring its best, Hitler had one major reservation which, in the case of Germany, he quickly corrected. He abolished the Roman Law because it permitted foreigners (particularly Jews) to become German citizens. This action reveals one of the significant differences between ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. The Greek contemplative ethos required a stable, traditional, conservative society based on the family; it was an *organic* society in which membership was only through blood. By contrast, the pragmatic Roman temper, which found expression in building bridges, roads, and viaducts, and the administration of law throughout the Empire, gave greater scope to the idea of citizenship, thus making it a matter of law and not of blood. The Roman spirit was reflected, therefore, in a society that was *mechanical* in concept.

Because of his hatred of the Jews, Hitler could not allow this Roman concept of citizenship, much less could he abide a people (the Jews) who had shown that their dispersed world community had been held together not by loyalty to a leader, or the state, or even *necessarily* to a common soil, but by their religion. Hitler's insistence on Jewry being a race and not a

35. Alan Bullock, *Hitler — A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Perennial Library, 1971), p. 230.

36. Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1960), p. 182.

religion was a recognition, in a negative way, of the historical significance of the Jews. It was not a Jewish army or state that Hitler warred against (the Jews had no army or state then), but the Jewish people as the embodiment of a religious spirit that, through Christianity, has permeated the Western consciousness and works against limiting concepts of what it is to be human.

The opposition to this split was displayed in its most savage form yet by Hitler's Germany. In the compressed time of twelve years he sought not only to exterminate the Jews, but also to foreclose Judeo-Christian history. In the attempt, he showed what Communism, in a different way, is also showing, that the priority of any world revolution is to invalidate Judeo-Christian civilization and to establish a new world order. The only alternative would be to stop resisting Judeo-Christian civilization and work, instead, for its fulfillment. While Hitler sought the destruction of Jewry, his apocalyptic outbursts showed that he was, nevertheless, held within its messianic thrall. Communism, too, in a secular fashion, has misappropriated the Judeo-Christian messianism that it denies. Messianic envy seems to be the propeller for much of today's world revolutionary activity.

It is not only revolutionaries, however, who seek to deny the historical significance of the Jews. Every theory of human history that hypostatizes abstractions from biological, sociological, and other sciences constitutes a repudiation of the meaning of Jewry which contains the meaning of history. Such theories have a way of finding political expression, as Hitler's Germany all too clearly showed. Thus, the life of the Jews, which has always been vicarious in the sense that they are the vicars of mankind, is also rendered precarious by such repudiation. Even liberal-democratic attempts to assign no special historical significance to the Jews can also, unintentionally, contribute to that repudiation.

It has to be recognized that the Jews *are* a special people with a special destiny (this is signified in both Jewish ritual and Christian liturgy), and it is a gross tragedy that Hitler in a most negative way recognized this. That is why he sought to deny the Jews their religion *and* their lives because these are synonymous with their history. Christianity has a stake in the survival of Jewry for they both share a common mission which they hope to see realized at the end of history. If anti-Semitism were to triumph, they would share a common defeat.

To obviate that possibility, Jew and Christian must emphasize the idea of history as eschatology, for if the thesis presented here is valid, neither the Holocaust nor the establishment of the State of Israel are guarantees against the eruption of Western cultural-psychological tensions into the field of history. Hitler inadvertently gave the world a cultural-psychological clue to that history for which a great price was exacted. He can be posthumously handed his greatest defeat by using that clue to achieve the final solution to Jew hatred.

Apologia For My Judaism

BENJAMIN KOVITZ

JUDAISM ENTERED HISTORY AS A COVENANT between God and Israel. According to Judaic tradition, God created the world, made man in his own image, chose the children of Israel to hear and transmit his revelation, and made an everlasting covenant with them to be their God and assure their destiny if they accepted his teaching (Torah). He is at once the author of existence and the arbiter of values. His directives, being divine, must be obeyed whether we understand their rationale or not. We must love and revere him whether he chooses to intervene in our world or to hide himself from us. In due time he will send the Messiah to set the world to rights. Meanwhile, what is required of the Jew is simply to carry out God's commands (*mizvot*).

The prophets proclaimed supreme moral insights, but the rabbis who followed them, understanding that insight is useless until translated into action, taught that practice took precedence even over learning. The shift from sacrificial rites to synagogue worship and study enabled the Jews to endure the loss of the Temple and to survive in the Diaspora. In the meantime, the rabbis continued through an unending interpretive dialogue to evolve the Way or Law (*Halakhah*), designed to regulate and sanctify every detail of Jewish existence in accordance with the principles of Torah. Judaism became, in this way, a communal enterprise for guiding one and all by norms held to represent, directly or indirectly, the will of God. A new ideal, if not soon to be fulfilled, had at least been born: that temporal power should submit to moral authority.

The tradition has always had its diversity and disagreements, but at least the fundamental assumption of a divinely inspired Torah was sacrosanct until the modern world began to undermine it. With Orthodoxy unshakeably committed to that assumption, Jews have split into a number of camps. Their quarrels might have been predicted, for even the rabbinic sages understood that the Bible speaks in metaphors and that the ineffable God has had to depend on human mouthpieces. Yet, the tradition steadfastly maintains the transcendent reality of the One whom it personifies as the author of its faith and the legislator of its practice.

Refracted through a critical prism, the divine radiance reveals its natural components. The Yahweh or Elohim of the Bible is a composite figure transparently fusing attributes of the natural world with attributes of man. As natural process, he creates a world and apportions life and death. As supernatural autocrat, he commands, punishes, and forgives,

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all for eminently human motives. He talks to patriarchs and to prophets and sometimes condescends to debate with them. Man seems to be his chief concern, or so man supposes. How far the designs of men can be taken as clues to cosmic destiny is, of course, precisely the question that theologians beg. Traditional Judaism does not doubt that God, though infinite and essentially indefinable, intervenes in human history with purposes that we may or may not discern. There is a certain irony in personifying a God who is, nevertheless, not to be portrayed by any image. The irony mounts when the universal God, who is conventionally conceived as benevolent, must, by reason of his unity, also be the author of evil.

The great affirmation of the *Sh'ma*, which proclaims that the Lord is One, expresses our human need for a coherent universe and a Supreme Being whom we can encounter as we do a person. God as creator and destroyer amounts to the irresistible flux of nature, which generates and annihilates every transitory thing. When we obey the commands of Torah, whether we can rationalize them or not, we symbolically acknowledge our dependence on the inscrutable reality that moves and engulfs us. But God and man are still more intimately linked. When Scripture describes man as made in the image of God, it not only affirms human worth but implies that God is also made in the image of man. If confirmation is needed, consider that justice and mercy, the two moral aspects of divinity, can exist as intelligible goals only for beings such as we are, struggling to create a life in common despite our differences and antagonisms.

The God who delights in life symbolizes the amazing effort of living things to survive in the face of adversity. To say that we love God is, therefore, to concentrate in a single phrase our passion for life, our submission to the real, and our pursuit of the good. The stern and solicitous injunctions that fill the Torah clearly project the evolving moral intuitions of our ancestors, who promulgated those intuitions in the name of God as a way to endow them with a transcendent authority. We who are the strangely imperfect creations of that perfect God still need the biblical warnings against idolatry to remind us how readily we misjudge values and abuse our autonomy. The prayerbook, which never tires of predicting the eventual triumph of the Almighty, by that very prediction betrays the fact that God represents not only cosmic potency but human ideals still unachieved. In every service the prayers quote "The Lord shall be King for ever and ever" (Exodus 15:18) and "The Lord shall be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord shall be One and his name One" (Zechariah 14:9). Meanwhile the long-awaited Messiah personifies and sustains our hope. "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth . . . The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord" (Isa. 65). The voice may be the voice of

God, but the words express the prophet's utterly human longing to reconcile man and nature and to overcome the incoherence of existence.

Torah and Halakhah, incomparable as they may be, can be considered divinely inspired with no more and no less justice than any other monument of human genius. Their human origin, visible on every page, leaves them as venerable as ever but hardly infallible. The Orthodox, of course, reject this view with a vehemence that betrays both the indemonstrability of their belief system and their anxiety about the fate of Judaism. If a skeptic still finds Torah divine, it is in a figurative sense, as an extraordinary effort of the human spirit to transcend itself.

Orthodox Jews, on the contrary, accept Torah as divine and Halakhah as heaven-ordained in a literal sense. I respect the sincerity of their devotion, but I cannot subscribe to their belief as they understand it. I must, therefore, exercise my own right to choose. The Orthodox also choose, and they have chosen to accept the tradition as absolute and unchallengeable. I sense in that unquestioning acceptance how deep a comfort attends the conviction that one is leading a divinely prescribed existence. By vesting authority in a self-perpetuating body of the learned, who trace every opinion, never mind how curiously, to a scriptural source, rabbinic Judaism created a system remarkable for its continuity and coherence, tolerant of disagreement in detail but permanently constricted in design. That system aims to keep Judaism radically separate and intact by means of a complete and definitive code of living which it justifies by treating the written and oral Torah as one unbroken stream of divine inspiration. For all its merits, that code represents a humanly shaped and limited ideal and, like all codes, it is in tension with living reality, not because it is divine, but because it is formalized. Life cannot conform perfectly either to Halakhah or to any other formalized system. In trying to conform to the very letter, the Orthodox have had to resort not only to extravagant rationalizations but, at times, to pious subterfuge or hypocrisy. Halakhah affords the security and discipline of submission to a sacred authority, but, when treated as an end in itself, it risks belying its own ideal.

To accommodate inevitable change, the halakhists have been forced to bridge by labored artifice the gap that their own system created between human need and divine law. Faced with the dangers of modernism, they have understandably grown more reluctant to continue that necessary revision. The whole process is, in one sense, an extraordinary game, played with enormous seriousness and ingenuity but, also, at a price. The game is worth it when it builds the humane world which Torah envisions. It has less worth when ritual becomes a governing obsession, and still less when fanatics misapply Torah in disregard of the very values that they profess to honor. Is it divine wisdom or human rigidity that forbids contemporary Orthodoxy to correct its prejudiced treatment of women?

Yet Halakhah has been the fortress of Judaism since classical times. If I challenge its pristine authority, what remains except an arbitrary or sentimental selection of practices and an ethical code? That prospect must dismay those who are devoted to the tradition. Loss of the old assumptions could lead to a state of religious anarchy and the transformation or, even, the dissolution of Judaism. This ominous possibility would seem to justify the reluctance of the deeply Orthodox to countenance even such flexibility as would be both humane and rational.

Can piety and reason ever share the same bed? In the hope of furthering some such union, acceptance of the Covenant has been urged as a way to curb too willful and divisive an autonomy, "Covenant" being understood for this purpose as making our relation to God our primary concern. This does not help us much. "Covenant" implies a reverential submission to the tradition — but to how much and to what portions of the tradition? The choices will still be arbitrary, just as the tradition itself is arbitrary, even though it was communally created and sustained. Any consensus about God and Covenant must rest on convention and tradition, because even an apparent consensus can be achieved only through indoctrination and submission to authority.

But we play an active part in what we think and believe. Our beliefs, much like our sense perceptions, are born in the encounter of mind and world, and necessarily reflect the influence of both. It follows that my experience of God can never entirely exclude my personal autonomy. Then what can the Covenant mean to me except allegiance to whatever in Judaism I find essential? And on what does that allegiance rest, if not on the purely contingent facts of my birth as a Jew, my rearing in the Jewish tradition, and my temperamental affinity with its vision? As these contingencies vary, so must my beliefs. In the end, no one else can decide my faith for me. This individualism may strike the Orthodox as impudent, if not blasphemous, yet any other decision would be insincere. We all have a need to conform and a need to deviate, but we can scarcely experience those needs in the same fashion or with the same force. There is far too much latitude between the poles of autonomy and conformity for any single understanding of the Covenant to satisfy everyone. Cannot God speak through my autonomy as well as through my tradition?

The Covenant between God and Israel is a metaphor that turns a human ideal into a universal power. The divine partner cannot hold up his end of the contract, however, except as a symbolic figure, because as an ideal he is the apotheosized shadow of human hopes, and as a power he manifests the supreme indifference of nature. The Covenant with that supernatural figure gives an ancient legal form to our quest for a transcendent source of values, while the numinous grandeur of the myth inspires and sustains the soul. Torah and Covenant, accordingly, command the allegiance of the devout Jew just as Jesus and the Gospel command the allegiance of the devout Christian. All such symbols, universal

in intent but particular in form, may enlist our sympathy but cannot compel our literal assent. Judaism, like every theism, therefore, exists in a state of tension between reason and faith so long as myth is misconstrued as fact. In search of relief, some discard formal religion as supernatural baggage. Others succumb to the anti-intellectual temper of the time and retreat to a dogmatic or mystical piety, while the rest are mostly content to follow conventional practice as a perfunctory or sentimental duty.

While Halakhah insists on a prescribed realization of Jewish values, the values themselves transcend their halakhic expression, for their core is respect for life and for human dignity. These ideals are properly of universal application and not exclusively Judaic, although Judaism certainly helped usher them into history. At least, they form the ethical source of Jewish unity. Yet, they are not enough, for Judaism is as particular as it is universal, and it gains its unique character from its pervasive system of ritual observance. This is the major ground of contention, because Jews seem to agree less than ever on how much formal observance their faith requires, or on how to draw any clear distinction between the values and the forms of their faith.

Ritual is evidently indispensable. We have always needed symbols and rites to help us celebrate and mourn and master the chaos of experience. Ritual has, as Pascal says of the heart, its reasons which reason does not know, and it offers help when reason alone is helpless. Outsiders may dismiss an alien ritual as something arbitrary and conventional, of purely local significance, but one can say the same of language and dress and every social convention. Like a language, then, which articulates universal meanings in its particular terms, Judaism speaks in the unique vocabulary of its ritual and practice. I esteem that ritual as poetry, not as law, yet I see how its observance celebrates the rhythms and routines of life in a spirit of communal gratitude and resolution. In its celebratory fervor, the liturgy carries the praise of God to what seems a naive extreme, until one comes to understand it as an affirmation of life in defiance of every insult that reality can inflict.

Yet, there are problems with the very ideal of hallowing life to the last detail by means of a compulsory system of ritual. Such a system can both free and constrict the spirit. It can open a vista and it can narrow the view. As a refuge for some and a prison for others, the halakhic edifice in its entirety is not for everyone. My question is, therefore: must Judaism be coextensive with Orthodoxy? I believe that such equivalence is neither possible nor desirable, and that those who insist on it are manifesting their anxiety as much as their faith.

Given the strains of human reasonableness and creative moral force that run through their history, Jews have grounds for mutual accommodation no matter how much they differ in formal observance. All are welcome to defend their personal convictions, but they would do even better to defend the right to diversity. Jews have never been of one mind either

in thought or in practice, and if Hillel and Shammai could agree to differ in their opinions, so can we. Judaism could not have survived without innovation, and change will continue because life cannot do otherwise. Whoever thinks there is only one right way to be a Jew is closing his eyes to his own bias and to the best of his own tradition. Here, again, is a confusion between symbols and the values they represent.

Our genius for symbols is at times our undoing. Religion cannot dispense with symbols any more than a language can dispense with words. Yet the symbol, while it helps integrate man with himself and his world, is not the essence of religion, any more than the word is the thing that it means. Because symbols are necessary, there is always the danger of making them ends in themselves. Worship of the symbol is thus a form of idolatry to which every religion is susceptible. Christian and Islamic zealots have persecuted heretics and unbelievers, and misguided Jews have desecrated the Sabbath in their zeal to prevent its desecration. But the most profound inspiration of Judaism has been to resist idolatry in every form. The great idolatries of our time are, of course, political and take the form of nationalism and totalitarianism rather than of Ashtoreth and Baal, but they are just as incongruent with the spirit of Judaism, which challenges every authority to justify itself on moral grounds and may, therefore, challenge even its own tradition when that tradition threatens to become an idol.

Jews obviously differ in how they view their tradition. Some cling to it blindly and others as blindly reject it. But what if emotional loyalty pulls the spirit one way and intellectual honesty another? I acknowledge the universal need for identity and affiliation, and while I accept what the accidents of birth and nurture have offered me in those respects, I cannot do so uncritically. If I am to accept Judaism, it must be on naturalistic terms. Since unanimity in religious thinking is out of the question, I neither expect nor desire to convert those whose faith requires them to differ with me, unless it be to a greater measure of tolerance. I can only hope that this apologia may help them to respect my skepticism as I respect their faith.

My loyalty to Judaism is surely, in part, a matter of sentiment, but sentiment need not be irrational. The fact that my faith has a pre-rational ground does not require me to be irrational in its defense or to demean the faith of others. All the special pleadings of apologists to the contrary, no religion and no sect is necessarily superior to another, and none is without its shortcomings. I simply accept what is mine. I cannot renounce my history or my ancestry, whatever their faults. And faults are always visible to a dispassionate eye. Judaism can claim Christianity and even Islam as its offspring, but why were those children so quick to turn against the mother who inspired them? The zeal of Judaism, which sustained it in the face of so many odds, may also have heightened those odds by infecting its offspring with the virus of its own intolerance. The preju-

dices of the Mosaic Jews, sexual and otherwise, had a certain historical justification, but their archaic elements have nevertheless contributed to the strain of puritanical cruelty in subsequent moralities.

Yet, Judaism has enriched civilization and, if, in some respects, it is open to criticism, it has suffered disproportionate punishment through its historical role as a scapegoat. The fate of the Jew has been a touchstone, a test of the right to exist as a dissenting minority. A society demonstrates its moral level by how it treats this obstinate people. Survival has not been easy for Jews, whose real faults have never matched the symbolic evil attributed to them by the unreason of anti-Semitism. Gentiles are sometimes nonplussed by the stiff-necked insistence of Jews on preserving an unpopular distinctiveness. But their stand represents a universal value. The right to be a Jew means not only the right to maintain an ideal and a life style, but the right to be different. Human beings, Jews included, are all too ready to deny each other that right, but this is hardly a reason not to assert it. Religious anarchy, rather than being a catastrophe, may be the price of genuine faith, for the more genuine the faith, the more it respects the inner unity and outer variety of all religions. Those Jews who would outlaw any deviance from Orthodoxy would make Judaism resemble those tyrannies from which the Jews themselves have suffered most. Would a faith that could be saved only by monolithic conformism be worth saving? If we are to do honor to Torah or hasten the coming of the Messiah, we need to grant our fellow Jews the tolerance that we desire for ourselves. Sooner or later, like the whole human race, we must decide: is it what divides us or what unites us that matters more?

Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik

MICHAEL OPPENHEIM

IN THE ESSAY, "THE LONELY MAN OF Faith," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik attempts to come to terms with that special kind of loneliness that is felt by the contemporary religious person. While religious people from the time of Abraham have known loneliness, this feeling has been intensified by the world in which we find ourselves today. To explore this situation, Soloveitchik utilizes insights developed and passed down by the generations who lived within his religious community, as well as some "modern theologico-philosophical categories." This essay shows Soloveitchik's great sensitivity to modern religious thinkers, in all traditions, who struggle with questions similar to this.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a very influential Christian thinker who lived in Denmark and whose work provides a powerful portrayal of the suffering and tension, as well as the peace and strength, that dwell within the religious person. He is best known for his early books which highlight the "fear and trembling" of the religious individual who stands utterly alone before God. This "existential" side of Kierkegaard, which has had great influence upon twentieth century religious thought, is what so closely parallels some of the views found in Soloveitchik's essay. However, there are important differences between these earlier, existential explorations and Kierkegaard's mature reflections on the nature of the religious life. In fact, many of the existentialist views that are usually attributed to Kierkegaard are taken from books written under one or the other of his many pseudonyms which were meant to indicate that the particular beliefs expressed in those books were not to be taken as Kierkegaard's own, but were merely part of his overall endeavor to look upon the religious life from different angles.¹

There are many points of contact between themes from Kierkegaard's corpus of works and ideas expressed in Soloveitchik's essay. These include the characterization of modern people as *aesthetic*, the understanding of the religious person in terms of the category of the *individual*, the experience of *time*, and the *uniqueness* of the religious life. While these points of convergence are interesting, what is of deeper

1. An important and lively discussion of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship is given by Stephen Crites, "Pseudonymous Authorship As Art and As Act," in Josiah Thompson, ed., *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Modern Studies in Philosophy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 183-229.

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importance are the ways in which Soloveitchik finds solutions to the loneliness of the modern religious person. They depart radically from the resolutions offered in Kierkegaard's existential works. Soloveitchik's foundation within the Jewish tradition gave him the resources to match Kierkegaard's portrait of the loneliness of the modern man of faith, as well as to point beyond this loneliness to some important remedies.

Kierkegaard understood the religious individual in terms of aesthetics. He wrote:

If then, according to our assumption, the greater number of people in Christendom only imagine themselves to be Christians, in what categories do they live? They live in aesthetic, or, at the most, in aesthetic-ethical categories.²

The modern person is aesthetic because his or her *telos* or goal is the pleasurable. Life is seen as the on-going search for experience of the beautiful and pleasurable; the new and the momentary are key values. The measure of life is seen entirely in terms of what one has taken from, or gained over, the outward, whether this be nature, or, as in the case of Don Juan, other people:

The aesthetic income is in the outward sphere, and it is this outward which provides assurance that the outcome is there; one sees that the hero has triumphed, has conquered the land, and then we are through with it.³

While the aesthetic person may not be unconcerned with God, God is only allowed a place within the understanding of life. This individual stage sees God everywhere in the world and feels a direct, natural, creaturely relation to the God-out-there, but the God-relationship is not the foundation for life. It is of value only because it provides a pleasant feeling or experience. It is in this "religious" feeling that the aesthetic person sees the God-relationship, but what this demonstrates for Kierkegaard is that, on the contrary, there is a lack of relation.

Soloveitchik also sees the modern individual, whom he calls "Adam the first," in terms of aesthetic categories: "Adam the first is always an esthete, whether engaged in an intellectual or ethical performance."⁴ Soloveitchik holds that dignity, which implies a glorious, majestic, and powerful existence, is the *telos* for Adam the first. Dignity is a term given to one by others, and it signifies that others have recognized one's achievements. The modern individual is concerned with gaining power over the outward and the visible. The aesthetic or majestic man may seek to have a relationship to God, but, again, the relationship is circumscribed by the way in which this person "relates" to other things. Since all of life is

2. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View For My Work As An Author*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1962), p. 25.

3. Soren Kierkegaard [Hilarius Bookbinder], *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Walter Lowrie and Introduction by Paul Sponheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 400.

4. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition* (Spring 1965): 15.

lived toward the outside, the encounter with God is found within the framework of the cosmic:

Majestic man, even when he belongs to the group of *homines religiosi* and feels a distinct need for transcendental experiences, is gratified by his encounter with God within the framework of the cosmic drama . . . he cannot interpret his transcendental adventure in anything but cosmic categories.⁵

Majestic man sees God as the creator and director of the universe, and he is satisfied with an aesthetic experience of this "cosmic" God, rather than struggling for a relationship which is more intense, individual, and binding.

Kierkegaard contrasts the aesthetic person with the religious individual who sees that the only real *telos* in life is the God-relationship. Only the God-relationship gives permanence, orientation and authenticity to human existence. Kierkegaard has one of his pseudonymous authors write: "Essentially it is the God-relationship that makes a man a man . . ."⁶ The God-relationship is not something that is won by doing battle with nature or with other people. "The religious outcome, indifferent to the outward result, is only assured in the inward sphere, that is, in faith."⁷ God is found in the "inner man," and not in nature. When the individual seeks after God alone, with a passionate single-mindedness, he or she finds that the primary battle is with *oneself*. The struggle for God comes about through the cultivation of this single-mindedness and inwardness to the utmost degree. To exist authentically means to exist as a single one, as an individual before God. This is what is meant by inwardness, "the relationship of the individual to himself before God, his reflection into himself."⁸ For Kierkegaard, only the individual can live in the realm of faith, where the existence of the crowd and even life within the boundary of ethics' universal norms must be overcome.

Soloveitchik also holds that authentic existence can be understood only from the standpoint of the category of the individual. "'To be' means to be the only one, singular and different, and consequently lonely."⁹ This individual is not concerned with other peoples' evaluations, or with outward results and conquests. For Soloveitchik, the individual finds legitimacy and worth only when he "lets himself be confronted and defeated by a Higher and Truer Being."¹⁰ And, in turn, the religious life demands the existential depth in living that comes to one who sees him/herself as an individual. The religious person understands that the

5. Ibid., p. 33.

6. Søren Kierkegaard [Johannes Climacus], *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton Paperback Edition, 1968), p. 219.

7. Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 400.

8. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 391.

9. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," p. 27.

10. Ibid., p. 24.

only goal for life is found in the God-relationship. A hallowed existence is found when the disciplined individual allows the self to be overcome by the confronting-God.

Kierkegaard saw that the existing individual's experience of time was a terrifying one. Everything is in motion, and the flux of time is seen both in the world in process and in humans who continually change. One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms described the flux of time in this way: "But precisely because every moment, like the sum of the moments, is a process (a going-by) no moment is a present . . ." ¹¹ Human authenticity, which demands stability and continuity, can be found only if the individual is related to that which abides. For Kierkegaard, God, alone, provides this type of stability.

Soloveitchik also realized that the experience of the flux of time intensifies the quest for God. The individual is conscious of living in a constantly moving stream of time. He is related neither to the beginning nor to the end of that stream, and his brief "now" passes before he can grasp it. For Soloveitchik, "the whole accidental character of his being is tied up with this frightening time-consciousness." ¹² For the individual to escape this flux of time and to give reality to his existence as a temporal being, he (or she) must be related to something permanent, which will give existence an orientation in time.

All of Kierkegaard's works portray the religious life as a unique stage of life that cannot be understood by other stages of life or by categories drawn from other spheres of experience. His attack upon Kant and Hegel arose from the attempt of these men to understand and, in the end, to reduce the religious life to ethics or philosophy. Opposed to such reductionism, Kierkegaard carefully delineated the boundaries of the aesthetic, which includes speculative philosophy, the ethical and the religious life. Kierkegaard's most powerful pseudonymous work, *Fear and Trembling*, sought to show the uniqueness of the religious life by demonstrating that it could not be understood in terms of ethics and that it had elements that were not communicable to other people. As Abraham, "the knight of faith," demonstrated, the religious category is beyond the ethical, since it demands the "teleological suspension of the ethical." ¹³ The ethical is the universal, that which is lived under the universal ethical laws and that which can thus be understood by all. In this view, the religious is the area of the singular one, where the universal laws of ethics are suspended or held in check, because the individual stands alone before God.

11. Soren Kierkegaard [Vigilius Haufniensis], *The Concept of Dread*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton Paperback Edition, 1967), p. 77.

12. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith", p. 46.

13. Soren Kierkegaard [Johannes De Silentio and Anti-Climacus], *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton Paperback Edition, 1968), p. 64.

Since the religious is not the universal, speech, which can deal only with what is common to people, must give way to silence:

Abraham keeps silent — but he *cannot* speak. Therein lies the distress and anguish. For if I when I speak am unable to make myself intelligible, then I am not speaking — even though I were to talk uninterruptedly day and night. Such is the case with Abraham.¹⁴

The religious life is the realm of faith, because faith begins when the understanding can no longer continue. Faith is the passionate grasp of something that the understanding sees as unintelligible or even absurd. “Faith is the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness. . . .”¹⁵ The religious life is unique, because it is the realm of faith, infinite passion, and silence.

The religious life is also seen by Soloveitchik as unique because it is irreducible. Although certain elements of it can be understood in terms of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the philosophic realms, it has a core which is untranslatable. The religious is the realm of faith, where passion and commitment, rather than reason, direct life:

The very instant, however, the man of faith transcends the frontiers of the reasonable and enters into the realm of the unreasonable, the intellect is left behind and must terminate its search for understanding. The man of faith animated by his great experience is able to reach the point at which not only his logic of the mind but even his logic of the heart and of the will, everything — even his own “I” awareness — has to give in to an “absurd” commitment. The man of faith is “insanely” committed to and “madly” in love with God.¹⁶

In his endeavor to explore the dimensions of the modern religious individual's loneliness, Soloveitchik gave expression to insights that are also found in Kierkegaard's works. However, Soloveitchik believed that this radical loneliness was not irremediable. He found that the religious life is punctuated by moments of majesty and comradeship as well as by moments of loneliness. In describing these other dimensions of the religious life, he no longer parallels what is offered in the early works of Kierkegaard. The extent of Soloveitchik's departure from him can best be seen through an examination of the paradigms which each man uses to understand the way that the religious person stands before God. For Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes De Silentio, the paradigm of faith is Abraham's trial at Mt. Moriah, while for Soloveitchik it is the encounter with God in prayer.

De Silentio describes Abraham as the “knight of faith” and the paradigm of religious faith for all people. It is highly significant that Abraham's encounter with God at Mt. Moriah, the *akedah* event, is singled out,

14. Ibid., p. 122.

15. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 540.

16. Soloveitchik, “The Lonely Man of Faith,” p. 61. Soloveitchik offers a critique of Kierkegaard's term “absurd” in a footnote to pages 61-62.

rather than any other aspect of the relationship between Abraham and God. In *Fear and Trembling*, De Silentio portrays Abraham as standing alone before God. Abraham is alone, and he can speak to no one, neither to Sarah nor to Isaac, of what he must do. In addition, Abraham is portrayed as a man without worth before God, who puts him on trial. Abraham is tested. In this episode there is no reciprocity, since Abraham's relationship to God is expressed in his complete submission to God's demand. God asks of Abraham his dearest possession, his son.

De Silentio goes to great lengths to show what Isaac means for Abraham, in order to accentuate the trial. Abraham was given Isaac as a gift from God, because both he and Sarah were too old to expect this boy to be born. He cannot hope to have another son to replace this one. Isaac is also seen as the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham that his seed will grow and become a blessing to all the nations. If Isaac dies, the promise cannot be fulfilled and Abraham's seed is dead. However, Abraham withstands the test. He has faith that God's promises will be fulfilled, while, at the same time, he is willing to sacrifice Isaac.

This faith and willingness indicate many things. The religious person must be willing to sacrifice the world, "to die to the world," just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his world, Isaac. Abraham never faltered in this faith that somehow, as absurd as it may have been, Isaac would be returned to him. Thus, even though the religious person is willing to sacrifice the world, there is also faith that the world will be given back. Finally, Abraham acted out what it means to have faith. Faith is concerned with the absurd. Faith is a passionate belief that goes beyond anything that can be grasped by the understanding. It is precisely where reason fails that faith brings the individual into relationship with God.

There is one other important aspect of the individual's relation to God which is not part of the Abraham story, but which the author of *Fear and Trembling* saw as so essential that he introduced it into his account of the trial. Abraham felt as "nothing" before God, and De Silentio adds to this nothingness the feeling of guilt and sin.¹⁷ The individual stands before God not only in complete submission, but also in guilt and sin. Consciousness of guilt and consciousness of sin are seen as pervasive elements in the way the religious person confronts God. It is only with this consciousness of guilt and sin that faith becomes so indispensable. The leap of faith is the religious person's absurd belief that even though he or she stands before God in guilt and sin, a relationship to God can be found.¹⁸

17. See the third story of the trial of Abraham in Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 28-29.

18. The portrayal of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* has elicited an intense discussion from a number of Jewish critics. Robert Gordis, in *Jewish Ethics for a Lawless World* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 103-110, has responded that it is "a distortion of biblical faith itself" to argue that Abraham was commanded by God to "violate the moral law

The significance for Kierkegaard of the basic elements in the description of Abraham's trial can be demonstrated by looking at his *Journals*:

[*Dying to the world*] . . . So too with dying to the world, in order to be able to love God. God is spirit — only one who is dead can speak that language at all. If you do not desire to die then neither can you love God, you talk of quite different things from him.¹⁹

[*Sin and Guilt*] From an early age I have suffered from a thorn in the flesh to which the consciousness of sin and guilt has attached itself; I have felt myself to be different. This suffering, this difference I have understood as my relation to God . . .²⁰

For Soloveitchik, prayer and prophecy are the paradigms for the encounter with God. The example of prayer will be examined, since there is no difference in content, according to him, between it and prophecy. The single difference is that one is man-initiated while the other is God-initiated. "Prayer is basically an awareness of man finding himself in the presence of and addressing himself to his Maker, and to pray has one connotation only: to stand before God."²¹

Soloveitchik describes two types of awareness that are felt in prayer. The first has its parallel in the above description of Abraham. It is the awareness of one's nothingness before God:

. . . The awareness which comes with prayer is rooted in man's experiencing his "creatureliness" . . . and the absurdity embedded in his own existence . . . the *Tefillah* awareness negates the legitimacy and worth of human existence. Man, as a slave of God, is completely dependent upon Him. Man enjoys no freedom.²²

The other awareness cannot be found in De Silentio's interpretation of Abraham's trial.

During the recital of *Shema* man ideally feels totally committed to God and his awareness is related to a normative end, assigning to man ontological legitimacy and worth as an ethical being whom God charged with a great mission and who is conscious of his freedom either to succeed or to fail in that mission.²³

This awareness is central to Soloveitchik's understanding of the religious person, who feels that he is nothing before God, but that he also has real worth and legitimacy in his relationship to God. Man has a covenant with

as he understood it." Louis Jacobs presents a variety of Jewish responses to De Silentio's story in "The Problem of the *Akedah* in Jewish Thought," Robert Perkins, ed., *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1981), pp. 1-9.

19. Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, trans. and ed. with Introduction by Alexander Dru (Oxford University Press, 1938), #1266. Dru numbers the entries in this edition.

20. *Ibid.*, #1288.

21. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," p. 35.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

23. *Ibid.*

God, which means that both partners in the covenant recognize the worth of each other. People are not just slaves of God. God has given humans a moral mission, and God relies upon them as ethical beings. The mission not only validates the “ontological legitimacy” of humans, but also the worth of the world. People are asked to realize God’s plan in the world. The individual is not asked to die to the world, nor is the world seen as a temptation to be overcome. Life in the world is not merely given back at the end, since life in the world is an essential part of the encounter between God and man. It is *in* the world that people act out this relationship.

Prayer embodies one other element for Soloveitchik: the community. Prayer is not just a dialogue between an I and a Thou; that takes place out of the foundation of a community and is always related to a concern for community:

The foundation of efficacious and noble prayer is human solidarity and sympathy or the covenantal awareness of existential togetherness, of sharing and experiencing the travail and suffering of those for whom majestic Adam the first has no concern.²⁴

Thus, prayer embodies many important elements in Soloveitchik’s understanding of the religious person, elements that are not found in Kierkegaard’s early pseudonymous writings.²⁵ They are the following: 1) Humans have legitimacy and worth; they are not just “dust and ashes.” 2) This legitimacy and worth are given to people as ethical beings who have a moral mission in the world. This idea can also be formulated as an imperative — the encounter with God “must be crystallized and objectified in a normative ethico-moral message.”²⁶ 3) People live out this relationship to God through acting in the world. 4) The encounter with God has the community as its foundation and its constant reference.

These elements found in prayer transform and re-direct the insights that, at first, Soloveitchik and Kierkegaard seemed to share. Each of the themes is cast in a new light, and Soloveitchik indicates resolutions to the dilemmas of the religious person that are entirely different from those which Kierkegaard sought to offer. The extent of these differences can be seen by re-examining the themes that were recognized as common to both.

The first theme isolated Kierkegaard’s and Soloveitchik’s description of the modern individual as aesthetic. What characterizes this description is the modern quest for legitimacy and power in the confrontation with the world. For Kierkegaard this quest was seen as misdirected, because legitimacy or authenticity can be found only by turning away from the

24. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

25. Kierkegaard’s mature writings offer deeper insights into the religious individual’s life in the world. His *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses* eloquently speak of the religious person’s life with others, although some essential differences with Soloveitchik remain.

26. Soloveitchik, “The Lonely Man of Faith,” p. 38.

world, and focusing on the inner person. In relation to the struggle for religiosity, the world is regarded as a temptation. Although Kierkegaard held that the religious person is, in the end, given the world, prior to this there must be the willingness to die to the world. Kierkegaard struggled to say "Yes" to the world.

Soloveitchik does not have to struggle to say "Yes" because he believes that the world is a legitimate realm for humans. Soloveitchik questions only those who emphasize human dignity to the exclusion of the need for a deeper kind of "covenantal existence." The majestic man, who seeks to dominate his environment, is expressing a legitimate aspect of his humanity. "Man reaching for the distant stars is acting in harmony with his nature which was created, willed, and directed by his Maker."²⁷ Action in the world is commanded by God. The relation between commandment and action is seen in the Halakhah, whose norm binds together the encounter with God and action in the world:

... The Halakhah sees in the ethico-moral norm a uniting force. The norm which originates in the covenantal community addresses itself almost exclusively to the majestic community where its realization takes place.²⁸

Kierkegaard held that the religious life must be expressed through the category of the individual. Abraham's standing alone on Mt. Moriah is the paradigm of faith. The loneliness of the individual is taken by Kierkegaard as one aspect of the suffering that the religious life entails. In *De Silentio's* descriptions of Abraham's trial in *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham leaves Mt. Moriah in an unredeemable state of loneliness.

For Soloveitchik, authentic existence is expressed in the feeling of loneliness, but the religious life offers a real way of also finding community. When God establishes a covenant with humans, people are brought into relation with both God and others. God's revealing of Himself brings into existence a new community, the covenantal community. It is there, where people are bound together in their commitment to God, that the religious individual is redeemed from loneliness:

Only when God emerged from the transcendent darkness of He-anonymity into the illuminated spaces of community-knowability and charged man with an ethico-moral mission, did Adam *absconditus* and Eve *abscondita*, while revealing themselves to God in prayer and in unqualified commitment — also reveal themselves to each other in sympathy and love on the one hand and common action on the other. Thus, the final objective of human quest for redemption was attained; the individual felt relieved from loneliness and isolation.²⁹

The existing individual's feeling of *angst* that arises out of the experience of the flux of time is depicted by both Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik who saw that redemption from this experience of coming to be and

27. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

passing away was one of the most important needs of the religious person. However, the difference in what each means by redemption from time is very striking. For Kierkegaard, redemption from time was individual-oriented and expressed in terms of the individual living at peace with himself. It signifies a curtailment of proceeds and human becoming, and an experience of one full moment, unrelated to past or future:

Everyone would like to have lived *at the same time* as great men and great events: God knows how many really live at the same time as themselves. To do that (and so neither in hope or fear of the future, nor in the past) is to understand oneself and be at peace, and that is only possible through one's relation to God, or it is one's relation to God.³⁰

For Soloveitchik, the ravages of time are conquered by the new orientation to time that is a product of the God-relation. The flux of time finds redemption through the experience of living in the covenantal community which transforms the flux of time into religious time. Life in the community gives the individual an orientation, in terms of the past, present, and future of the community. The individual now has a meaningful place within time:

In the covenantal community the man of faith finds deliverance from his isolation in the "now," for the latter contains both the "before" and the "after." Every covenantal time experience is both retrospective, reconstructing and reliving the bygone, as well as prospective, anticipating the "about to be." In retrospect, covenantal man re-experiences the rendezvous with God in which the covenant, as a promise, hope, and vision, originated. In prospect, he beholds the full eschatological realization of this covenant, its promise, hope, and vision.³¹

Redemption from time is an experience of living contemporaneously with all of those who make up the history of the covenantal community. This is an experience that leads to fullness and creativity. An example of this is Halakhic man's dialogue with past and future sages in the study of Torah.

He is no longer an evanescent being. He is rooted in everlasting time, in eternity itself. And so covenantal man confronts not only a transient contemporary "thou" but countless "thou"-generations which advance toward him from all sides and engage him in the great colloquy in which God Himself participates with love and joy.³²

Kierkegaard and Soloveitchik speak of the uniqueness of the religious life. It cannot be reduced to the aesthetic, the ethical, or the philosophic. Both argue against a stance represented by the Logical Positivists, that truth in one area of life, i.e., the religious, must be fully translatable into empirical-scientific terms or else this truth has no meaning.

Kierkegaard saw a dialectical relation between the religious life and the aesthetic and ethical, which are seen essentially as temptations for the

30. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, #700.

31. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," p. 46.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

religious person. For example, one type of temptation is related to the way the God-relation is to be found. The aesthetic life speaks of a "direct", natural relation to the God in the world, while the ethical speaks of finding God by living in accordance with the universal norms of ethics. For Kierkegaard, there can be no "direct" relation to God, and the religious life demands the "teleological suspension of the ethical."

Soloveitchik sees a positive relation between the religious sphere and the others. There can be no reduction of the religious life into aesthetic or ethical categories, but there can be limited translation. The aesthetic, ethical, and the philosophic endeavors of people achieve their realization in the religious sphere. Soloveitchik wrote that "the human, creative, cultural gesture is incomplete if it does not relate itself to a higher *modus existitiae*."³³ The ethical realm, for example, must be grounded in what goes beyond the transience of the individual and society.

... The worth and validity of the ethical norm, if it is born of the finite creative-social gesture of Adam the first cannot be upheld. Only the sanctioning by a higher moral will is capable of lending to the norm fixity, permanence, and worth.³⁴

Soloveitchik's quest for self-understanding was enriched by the interplay of modern religious thought and the Jewish tradition. While there is no direct evidence that he wanted to utilize the particular insights of Kierkegaard, the areas of agreement between these two are very clear. They saw that the religious individual feels lonely and misunderstood in a world that emphasizes aesthetic pleasure, power, and majesty. However, Soloveitchik utilized the Halakhic conception of human nature to portray the partial redemption that is open to the religious person. Full redemption cannot be found. God demands that the individual not remain within the redeeming, covenantal community, but must move back and forth between the covenantal and the majestic communities and bind them together through action.

Some of the differences between Soloveitchik and Kierkegaard reflect differences in basic tendencies between the two religious traditions in which they lived. Although it is always a dangerous exercise to extract from the writings of two thinkers in order to expound about the differences between the Jewish and Christian traditions, a brief comment is in order. Kierkegaard's difficulty in affirming the goodness of the social world and his stringent call upon the single individual to pull himself away from others, what he called the "crowd," overstate some tendencies within Christianity that do not find a parallel within Judaism. The harsh loneliness of Kierkegaard's individual is tempered by Soloveitchik's Jewish experience of the religious person's life with others, both within the covenantal community and in the wider social world.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Still, there are times in “The Lonely Man of Faith” when the reader senses that Soloveitchik recognized that there was a loneliness and inability to communicate fully even *within* the covenantal community. Loneliness is inseparable from the life of the religious person who speaks in “unique logoi.”

Elisha was indeed lonely but in his loneliness he met the Lonely One and discovered the singular covenantal confrontation of solitary man and God who abides in the recesses of transcendental solitude.³⁵

Here, once again, Soloveitchik’s insight has a strong parallel to the thoughts of that nineteenth century Dane whom we have been examining.

35. Ibid., p. 67.

Ahab in Bible and Talmud

NAHUM M. WALDMAN

THOUGH HE IS NOT AS FAMOUS AS HIS WIFE Jezebel, Ahab, the son of Omri, remains one of the best known of the kings of Israel. But which Ahab? There is one view of him — and probably two — in the Bible, there is another — and once again possibly two — in rabbinic literature; and, finally, there is the testimony of historical records and archaeology. While the Bible admits that Ahab was a warrior and builder, it plays down those achievements and stresses that he was the arch idolator. On the other hand, he was sensitive enough to be humbled by Elijah's rebuke after the execution of Naboth. The archaeological record shows Ahab to have been a successful military commander and creative builder. What is particularly interesting is that the rabbinic conception of Ahab comes closer to the image suggested by the extra-biblical material than to the image presented in the Bible. While the rabbis acknowledge Ahab's idolatry, they stress his military prowess. Surprisingly, they even see him as a great supporter of Torah. We shall examine below the reason for the rabbinic revaluation.

The Bible reports of Ahab that he did "what was displeasing to the Lord, more than all who preceded him." Not content to follow the sins of Jeroboam ben Nebat, he took as wife Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal of the Phoenicians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. He also set up an altar to Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made a sacred post (*asherah*). He did more to vex the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who preceded him (1 Kings 16:30-33). This negative evaluation was transmitted to later generations, and Manasseh, in his sin and the subsequent retribution, is compared to Ahab (2 Kings 21:3, 13; cf. also Mic. 6:16). Elijah accuses Ahab of being the bringer of trouble upon Israel (*okher Yisrael*) because of his worship of Baal (1 Kings 18:18). After sulking like a child (1 Kings 21:5), an unflattering depiction by the hostile biblical writer, Ahab accepts Jezebel's perversion of justice, which unlawfully deprives Naboth of his ancestral vineyard and of his life. Elijah then accuses him: "Would you murder and take possession?" (1 Kings 20:19).

In a few situations the Bible depicts Ahab in a somewhat more positive light. When Ben Hadad, the Aramean, first stipulates that all of Ahab's silver and gold, his wives and his children are his, Ahab humbly accepts this position of vassalage. However, when Ben Hadad presses his

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humiliating demand further and threatens to come to Ahab's palace and take what he wants, the elders and all of Israel are on Ahab's side. They tell him to resist and go to war. Ahab's military skill was not questioned and he showed strength by answering Ben Hadad: "Let not him who girds on his sword boast like him who ungirds it." The prophets supported him because Ben Hadad had offended God, thinking that God's power was limited to the mountains and that He could be defeated in the plain. However, when, after the second battle, Ahab did not press his advantage, failing to kill Ben Hadad, the prophets became angry with him.

The prophetic movement saw war as the arena in which God subdues His enemies. Ben Hadad was the man whom God had doomed to total destruction and who must not survive (*ʿish chermi*). The prophetic group sought to expand the original biblical group of seven nations doomed to total destruction and to include the Arameans. Ahab, however, pursued the path of realism and conciliation. He understood that it was not possible to achieve an ultimate crushing victory over the Arameans and that, in a future battle, they could retaliate effectively. He also saw the commercial advantages to Israel of cooperation with the Arameans. When the servants of the defeated Ben Hadad termed their monarch Ahab's "slave," Ahab raised the defeated Ben Hadad to the level of a "brother," that is, an equal and not a vassal, a sharp contrast to the humiliating terms which Ben Hadad had earlier attempted to impose upon him, and he arranged to have commercial concessions in Damascus (1 Kings 20:32-34). The contrast between "slave," vassal, and "brother," co-equal monarch, is familiar from treaty language in the Ancient Near East. For example, the Egyptians and Hittites concluded a peace treaty in 1269 B.C.E., and the Hittite king says of his Egyptian counterpart, "He is a brother [to me] and I am a brother to him and at peace with him forever."¹

The prophets could not make peace with this realism. They saw it as a lack of faith, for, they believed, God was always on hand with His vast invisible forces to fight for His people (2 Kings 6:17).

In its final summary of Ahab's reign, the Bible alludes to the ivory panelled palace which he built and all the towns that he fortified, but does not care to dwell upon these achievements. The reader is simply referred to the annals of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 22:39).

The biblical text does attribute something positive to Ahab, from the religious point of view of the prophetic movement. After the execution of Naboth and Elijah's denunciation, Ahab rends his clothes and walks about subdued (1 Kings 21:27-29).

A view less than totally condemnatory, yet falling short of expressing approval, is that Ahab was a vacillator. 1 Kings 22 presents a dramatic scene in which Ahab is shown as really knowing the truth but lacking the

1. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 202. (Hereafter, ANET.)

courage to admit it. When he plans to go to war against Aram, with the help of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, the latter king seeks the guidance of a prophet who is independent of the obviously biased four hundred official prophets. Ahab could easily have denied that a dissenting prophet was available, but he does not do so. He mentions Micaiah, complaining all the while that that prophet never gave him a positive message (as if prophets could choose what they wanted to say, an ironic contrast with the behavior of the four hundred official prophets). The messenger who is sent to bring Micaiah admonishes him to give a positive message and thus please the king. The prophet, however, says, "I will speak only what the Lord tells me," but, when he enters the presence of the two kings, he says, in bitter sarcasm, "March and triumph! The Lord will deliver it into your Majesty's hands." Ahab now hears the words that he wants to hear but understands that they do not reflect the prophet's real intention. The king has enough intelligence to realize that the prophet is bitterly mocking of the official prophets when he pretends to flatter the king. Ahab also has enough respect for the prophet's truthfulness to attach more weight to it than to the ravings of the official four hundred. Upon hearing Micaiah's sardonic response, Ahab explodes: "How many times must I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" When he finally does hear the bitter truth from Micaiah's lips, Ahab turns to Jehoshaphat and says: "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good fortune for me but only misfortune?" Ahab knows the difference between false and true prophecy. He knows enough to doubt the false prophets and to realize that favorable words sarcastically spoken are not Micaiah's true message. He lacks, however, the strength to accept and act upon the straight and unflattering truth.

In the biblical account, we are seeing Ahab through the eyes of the prophets who cannot forgive him his acquiescence in the moral evil and idolatrous worship of his wife, Jezebel. The Bible acknowledges Ahab's military and building activities, but considers them insignificant as against his moral and religious guilt.

In a later period, Josephus paints the character of Ahab in very dark colors. Ahab

made no alteration in the conduct of the kings that were his predecessors, but only in such things that were of his invention for the worse, and in his most gross wickedness. [He] exceeded in madness and wickedness all [the kings] that went before him.

Josephus reports that Ahab began to repent after his murder of Naboth, but concludes his account by moralizing on the advantage of true prophecy, which Ahab ignored because he was deceived by the false.²

Later rabbinic views of Ahab are based upon the biblical record. Though they may appear fanciful and exaggerated, their emphasis upon

2. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII, xiii, 1, 8; xv, 6; cf. Harold W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 7 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976).

Ahab's power and wealth is corroborated by archaeology and by a careful reading of the Bible. For reasons that we shall discuss later, the rabbis, it appears, re-arranged the order of priorities of the biblical text and did not hesitate to tell of Ahab's worldly successes. He is described as one of three mighty world rulers, like Nebuchadrezzar and Ahasuerus (*Megillah* 11a). He was very wealthy and had seventy sons in Samaria and another seventy in Jezreel, each one owning a summer and a winter palace (*Midr. Esther Rabbah*, 1:12). Ahab dominated all of the world's 252 districts (*ibid.*, 1:5). When 232 kings plotted to rebel against him, he forestalled their plan by taking their sons as hostages (*Tanna debei Eliyahu* 9). Despite the rampant idolatry in Ahab's time, his generation did have merit. They never slandered each other and would not reveal that a hundred prophets were being concealed by Obadiah (*Deut. Rabbah*, 5:6).

As to Ahab's religious and moral character, there is the view of Rabbi Johanan that he flaunted his apostasy by writing on the doors of Samaria his denial of the God of Israel and that there was no furrow in the land upon which Arab did not plant an idol. Rabbi Levi stated that Ahab would excise the names of God from the sacred texts and write the name of Baal in their place. On the other hand, his father, Omri, is praised by Rabbi Johanan for having added a city (Samaria) in Israel, and Ahab is deemed worthy of twenty-two years on the throne because he revered the Torah, which was given with twenty-two letters. While his wife, Jezebel, measured out gold for the priests of Baal, Ahab generously supported the sages. For this generosity half of his sins were forgiven (*Sanhedrin* 92b).

The taking of Naboth's vineyard, which appears in the Bible as an abhorrent crime, is not excused by the Rabbis but is explained in different ways. One view is that Ahab had the right to take the vineyard on the grounds that the crown is entitled to the property of those who are executed as traitors (*harugei malkhut nikhsehen la-melekh*). Another view maintains that Ahab was a relative and heir of Naboth and, by that right alone, was entitled to inherit his property (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 4:6; *Sanhedrin* 48b). The Zohar states that Ahab took Naboth's vineyard by right but was unjust in executing him (*Zohar* I, 192b). The "spirit" which placed a false prophecy in the mouths of Ahab's four hundred prophets (1 Kings 22:21), inducing Ahab to venture forth to his death at Ramot-Gilead, was the spirit of Naboth, who wanted revenge against the man who had done him so much wrong. The Talmud, however, depicts God as telling the spirit to depart, for He will not tolerate in His presence a spirit of falsehood or of jealousy. A proverb is quoted to the effect that one who indulges his desire for revenge destroys his home (*Sanhedrin* 102b).

Ahab is described as weak in comparison with his wife. One view is that he was "cold," that is, having a weak sexual appetite, so that Jezebel had the images of two prostitutes painted on his chariot to arouse him (*Sanhedrin* 39b). The rabbis turn this weakness into a virtue. When Rabbi Levi lectured for six months about Ahab's sinfulness, Ahab came to him

in a dream demanding: "What sin have I committed against you that you interpret only the first part of the verse ('Indeed, there was never anyone like Ahab, who committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the Lord') and omit the latter part ('at the instigation of his wife Jezebel') [1 Kings 21:25])?" So Rabbi Levi, relenting, taught for six additional months that Ahab was sinful only because his wife was the instigator (*Y. Sanhedrin* 10:2). A similar story is told of the great royal sinner, Menasseh, who came to Rab Ashi in a dream to respond to a slight upon his qualifications (*Sanhedrin* 102b; see below).

We have noted that, from the biblical record itself, it is apparent that Ahab was not totally evil. He suffered remorse and showed contrition when Elijah rebuked him after the execution of Naboth. This is elaborated in the rabbinic view that Ahab fasted and prayed every day and had Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, whip him forty-three times a day (*Yalkut Shimon*, 1 Kings 21, #222). The rabbis classed Ahab as a great sinner, but one whose weakness before Jezebel counted in his favor. They acknowledged that he was a wealthy man, a conqueror, and a builder, and went further and depicted him as one who respected the Torah and its scholars.

Archaeological evidence shows that Ahab was a successful monarch in political, military and economic terms, aspects which the biblical writer considers unimportant but which the rabbis view positively. The annals of King Shalmanesser III of Assyria (858-824 B.C.E.) tell how that monarch attacked the Syrian city of Qarqar on the Orontes and was met by a coalition of kings, among them Ahab, the Israelite (*A-ḥa-ab-bu^{ma} Sir-ʿi-la-a-a*) who brought with him 2000 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers. The Assyrian king claimed a smashing victory, but the fact is that neither Hama nor Damascus were taken, and the coalition successfully deterred Shalmanesser's onslaught. These events took place in 853 B.C.E.³

The excavations at Samaria demonstrate the grandeur and opulence of the building activities of Omri and his son, Ahab. When Omri abandoned his former capital, Tirzah, he was seeking to develop a new conception of a royal enclave, one which was devoted entirely to the palace and its connected buildings and which was completely separate from any residential section. Other cities, like Jerusalem and the Canaanite towns, show no social differentiation between the palace and the surrounding buildings. Omri's achievement was the embodiment in stone of a lofty aristocratic attitude. There was also some very impressive engineering in his accomplishment. He levelled off the top of the hill of Samaria and extended the flat area with terraces supported by retaining walls. The terrace on which the royal quarter was built was 145 meters from east to west and 76 meters from north to south. The royal quarter was separate from the lower city and each had separate sets of fortifications. Phoenician

3. *ANET*, pp. 278-79.

craftsmen were employed to prepare and skilfully set massive polished stones which were exquisitely dressed. The joins between them were marvellously meticulous and chipped corners were repaired with an expertly prepared patch.

The archeologists see some differences between the realized plans of Omri and his son. Ahab found his father's outer wall inadequate, so he built stronger defenses. His casemate wall (a double wall filled in with rubble and earth) extended the enclosed area. On the north it is 33 ft. wide and on the west 16.5 ft. From a later stage, the Assyrian destruction of Samaria in 722, and from Nimrud in Mesopotamia come ivory carvings which were used to panel the homes of the wealthy and which illustrate the testimony of the Bible (1 Kings 22:39). From Hazor also comes evidence of the grand fortifications and buildings of Ahab. The size of the city was doubled as it expanded eastward. The old Solomonic gate was abandoned and a new one built. Well built storage facilities accommodated the material goods of a prosperous reign. The existence of Israelite bazaars in Damascus no doubt contributed to this wealth (1 Kings 20:34). In a later stratum, but originating in Ahab's time, were found Proto-Ionic columns, representing a stylized palm tree.⁴

We must now address ourselves to the question of why the rabbis chose to emphasize Ahab's wealth, military success and support of Torah. In their eyes Ahab was a great sinner in two senses: his sin was great and he was a superior man with great talents which he devoted to evil. Ahab was not alone in being a great sinner possessing major positive qualities. According to the rabbis, Jeroboam and Menasseh also possessed a great knowledge of Torah. The greater the sinner the weaker was his exegetical ingenuity, but it was nevertheless considerable. Menasseh, the worst of the royal sinners, could interpret the Torah in fifty-five different ways, Ahab in eighty-five and Jeroboam in a hundred and three (*Sanhedrin* 103b). When Rav Ashi referred to Menasseh as "our colleague," putting himself on Menasseh's level, that monarch came to him in a dream and embarrassed him, proving him uninformed about the most common halakhic situation, what part of the bread is broken for the *mozi*. Rav Ashi then asked Menasseh, "If your generation was so learned, how could you worship idols?" and the answer was, "Had you been there, you would have lifted the corners of your cloak and would have run after me" (*Sanhedrin* 102b). A later generation cannot assume a superior self righteous attitude toward Menasseh.

Similarly, the four laymen who are mentioned in the Mishnah (*Mish. Sanhedrin* 10:2) as having no share in the world to come, Balaam, Do'eg,

4. Kathleen Kenyon, *Royal Cities of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken, 1971), pp. 73-87; Avraham Negev, ed., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), p. 279; Y. Yadin, *Hazor* (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 162-170; Y. Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, translated by Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), p. 242.

Ahitophel and Gehazi, were not mediocrities in the eyes of the people. There is the view that, in several ways, Balaam was greater than Moses. He knew when God would speak to him and he could speak to God whenever he wished. He could also look directly at the Shekhinah (*Midr. Numb. R.* 14:20; *Midrash Aggadah*, Numb. 24:179). Do'eg was greatly learned in the Torah, but he was not sincere in his attachment to it and he later abandoned it (*Sanhedrin* 106b; *Midr. Shocher Tov*, 119:16). Ahitophel, like Do'eg, could raise three hundred halakhic questions regarding a tower that flies in the air, a mark of great dialectic subtlety (*Hagigah* 15b). Gehazi is described a hero in Torah, but he had three faults: he was jealous, lascivious and he denied resurrection (*Y. Sanhedrin* 10:2).

Ahab and the others listed in the Mishnah had greatness, but they allowed it to be diverted to evil deeds. The greater their abilities, the greater their sin. There is the talmudic passage which states: "The greater one is than his neighbor, the greater is his evil inclination" (*Sukkah* 52b). While these individuals lived in biblical times, they were made to correspond to types whom the rabbis knew well, great students of Torah who turned away from it precepts. Elisha ben Abuyah is an outstanding example. A parallel may be found in Aristotle's view that the tragic hero is a person of nobility who has a defect, a fatal flaw (*hamartia*) (*Poetics*).

If great sinners have the intelligence and strength to do great evil, they can also serve as models of repentance to lesser figures. If such a vigorous sinner finds his way back to God, the path of *teshuvah* is barred to no one. In the Mishnah, Rabbi Judah claims that Menasseh has a share in the world to come. This point is elaborated in the Talmud, which tells that God, to defy the accusing measure of justice, dug a hole in heaven enabling Menasseh to enter as an accepted repentant sinner (*Mish. Sanhedrin* 10:2; *Sanhedrin* 103a). Rabbi Johanan said, "Whoever denies that Menasseh has a share in the world to come weakens the hands of sinners (*merappeh yedeihen shel ba'alei teshuvah* [*Sanhedrin* 103a]). There is a view in the Yerushalmi that all seven individuals condemned in the Mishnah do have a share in the world to come (*Y. Sanhedrin* 10:2, end).

To summarize: the Bible does not deny that Ahab had military and administrative skills. The prophetic movement, which was hostile to him, played these down and emphasized his weakness and vacillation. The historical and archaeological record shows Ahab to have been a strong and effective king. The rabbis, while recognizing Ahab's sins, stressed his strengths as a military man and as a powerful king. They also interpreted his dependence upon Jezebel in his favor and not to his detriment. They saw him as a king who respected Torah and the scholars. In their view, a great person who sins is more interesting than a mediocrity. First there is the puzzle: how can such a one turn to sin? Then there is also the encouragement of his example to others who have sinned and find in him inspiration to repent.

Process and Pluralism in Conservative Judaism

ROBERT GORDIS

AT THIS POINT IN THE HISTORY OF CONSERVATIVE Judaism, both friend and foe are loud in lamenting the disarray they see in its ranks, its friends eager to offer prescriptions to cure its ills and its foes announcing that the patient is beyond recovery. The diagnoses and the remedies may be subsumed under two principal categories. Either the movement is charged with lacking a *locus standi*, a firm body of doctrine and practice that is needed if the movement is to have a distinctive character, or, it is argued, its healing depends on the full application of the principle of "pluralism," offering hospitality to all points of view on theology and law.

A convenient illustration of these two approaches is to be found in a brief symposium which recently appeared and included Rabbis Paul Plotkin, Harold Schulweis, Ronald Price and Judah Nadich. Each contributed a short piece under the title, "I Love Conservative Judaism, but . . ." ¹ Only the last named writer seems reasonably satisfied with the current state of affairs in Conservative Judaism. The other three criticize it as being insufficiently "halakhic" or "traditional" or "pluralistic."

These are not idle or frivolous challenges. Those who call for a clear statement of the Conservative position are concerned with the ability of the movement to offer guidance to the millions of men and women under its banner. Those who extol the virtues of pluralism point out that Conservative Judaism cannot retain its broad base of support if it seeks to impose a rigid pattern of conformity, which will inevitably exclude substantial elements of the movement and thus deplete its human resources. If both views have substantial merit, are Conservative Jews impaled forever on the horns of a dilemma or must they sacrifice one position in order to salvage the other?

I should like to suggest that one need not make so unhappy a choice. In the words of Koheleth: "It is better to grasp the one and hold fast to the other. For he who reverences God will do his duty by both" (Ecc. 7:18). It is necessary to explore the history of the movement from its origin to the present in order to comprehend fully both the mutual relationship of process and pluralism in Conservative Judaism, as well as the roles that they play.

The current celebration of the Seminary Centennial should not lead

1. *Sh'ma*, May 29, 1987.

one to overlook the fact that the movement had originated in Europe and already had a sixty-year history before the Jewish Theological Seminary of America opened its doors.

Indeed, the movement has had several distinct periods, each of which contributed to its progress and growth. It began at the Brunswick rabbinical conference in 1845, when Zechariah Frankel, who was in attendance, walked out of the session at which it was voted that Hebrew was not "objectively necessary" for prayer and that it should be retained only out of deference to the older generation. While he agreed with Abraham Geiger that critical research was needed to reveal the past history of Judaism, he maintained that what had come down from the past must be honored as a permanent element in the tradition from which it would be disastrous to part.

In 1854, Frankel was appointed rector of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, which, until it was forcibly shut down by the Nazis a century later, was the fountain-head of modern Jewish scholarship in Europe and the model for rabbinical schools throughout the world.

Challenged both from the right and the left to explicate his approach to Judaism, Frankel defined his concept by the famous formula of "positive-historical" Judaism. "Historical" means that Judaism has grown and developed through time, "positive" that one is to take a positive or an affirmative attitude toward the product of this historical development.² Frankel defended this position, on the one hand, against Samson Raphael Hirsch who denied that Judaism had a history, because it was God-given and, therefore, like its Divine source, was unchanging through time and, on the other hand, he had to do battle against Geiger and Holdheim who denied that it was incumbent on modern Jews to maintain a "positive" attitude toward Jewish tradition. To be sure, Judaism had a history worthy of respect, but Jews were not bound to be governed by the product of that history. Thus, until a few years ago, the museum exhibit of an American Reform institution showed a pair of Tefillin with the caption, "Tefillin, or phylacteries, were used by Jews in daily prayer."

The history of the Conservative movement may be roughly divided into three overlapping periods:

A. *European Conservatism, from 1845 until World War I, the "Frankel era."* This philosophy of Judaism met both the spiritual and the intellectual needs of the Jews of central and western Europe who had been admitted to political citizenship and enjoyed the social, cultural and economic opportunities that came in its wake. Many of those who had been exposed to the culture of modernity and, in fact, contributed to it, sought at the same time to preserve their Jewish identity and their rootedness in the Jewish tradition.

2. This is the interpretation of the formula presented, for example, in M.L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia, 1927, often reprinted), p. 663.

In addition, the pre-eminent Jewish scholars who taught, or were trained, in the Breslau seminary dominated the landscape throughout the nineteenth century. The important seminaries in Vienna and Budapest, as well as the somewhat less illustrious institutions in London, Paris and Padua, along with the consciously competitive Orthodox and Reform rabbinical schools in Berlin, were all patterned after Frankel's school in Breslau. Only the Jewish masses in the *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe were impervious to all of these developments or were entirely unaware of them, though it is often overlooked that religious modernism had made significant inroads in the larger cities like Petrograd, Moscow, Vilna and Warsaw.

The term "Conservative" was probably first applied to the movement by Solomon Schechter at the beginning of this century. Previously, there had been no single designation in Europe because it included a broad spectrum committed to "positive-historical Judaism." Nevertheless, European conservatism was marked by few — if any — of the characteristics in practice which are associated with Conservative Judaism today. The prayer books were basically Orthodox. No changes in doctrine or form were introduced into the Siddur or Mahzor, and the houses of worship lacked the most obvious trait of contemporary Conservative synagogues — family pews. Actually, segregated seating was, and continued to be, universal in European synagogues of all denominations, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, not only in the nineteenth century, but right up to World War I and beyond. Mixed seating, which has developed various patterns even in Orthodox synagogues on the North American continent, is to be understood as *minhag America*. That change reveals the impact of the American environment on all branches of American Judaism.³

It is fair to say that European Conservative Judaism differed from Orthodoxy in its acceptance of the permissibility and even the necessity for historical-critical scholarship, but diverged very slightly from it in theological doctrine or practical observances.

B. *The first period of American Conservatism, from 1902 until approximately 1945 (the end of World War II), the "Schechter era."* For decades, after Schechter's passing in 1913, the Seminary was popularly called "Schechter's seminary." His influence was dominant, both in his own person and through his colleagues and disciples, the most influential and creative of whom has been Louis Finkelstein, whose leadership spanned the second stage, and much of the third, in American Conservatism. Primarily, this

3. There have been two lawsuits in American-Jewish history involving the change from segregated to mixed pews, one in Mount Clemens, Michigan, and the other in Cincinnati, Ohio. The various statements by rabbinic authorities on the subject are assembled in Baruch Litvin, *The Sanctity of the Synagogue* (New York, 1959). The documents on the Cincinnati controversy appear in *Conservative Judaism*, 15 (Fall 1956): 1-73.

was a period dedicated to conserving the basic elements of tradition against the tide of Reform.

It should be noted that without formal decision by any official body or recognized scholarly or rabbinic authority — indeed, almost unconsciously — a major change was introduced in the American Conservative synagogue. It was the all but universal adoption of family seating in the synagogue, as already noted.

In the area of liturgy, the prayer book was still Orthodox. There were individual prayer books, like those by Benjamin Szold and Marcus Jastrow, that represented innovations toward the left, but most of those issued by Conservative rabbis were essentially Orthodox. So was the *United Synagogue Festival Prayer Book*, a beautifully printed, handsomely gotten-up, well-translated work. The only change was the permission granted to a distinguished Seminary alumnus, Rabbi Jacob Kohn, to reprint the Mahzor with one change in the Musaf, where the alteration in the tense of two verbs transformed the Orthodox prayer for the restoration of animal sacrifices into a historical reminiscence of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.⁴

Nevertheless, this stage was characterized by movement in several directions, notably, the role and rights of women in Judaism. It focused attention on their Jewish education — a novelty in the beginning of the century. The Teachers Institute of the Seminary was probably the first institution for the higher Jewish education of women on a plane of equality with men. It was initiated by Schechter when he asked Dr. Mordecai Kaplan to accept the principalship of the Teachers Institute. Otherwise, the role of women in the synagogue — or their non-role — and their position of inferiority in the Jewish law of marriage and divorce remained undisturbed.

C. *The third stage in the history of the movement, from the end of World War II to the present.* The decisive defeat of the Nazi onslaught on civilization revealed the full dimensions of the Holocaust, the darkest episode in the long history of man's bestiality. The hellish fires of the crematoria were, in a sense, the crucible out of which the new state of Israel was born, and its growth, preservation and character have been a major concern of world Jewry during the past four decades. Conservative Judaism, in the face of the opposition of both Orthodoxy and Reform throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, had made the centrality of Jewish peoplehood a cardinal doctrine. The State of Israel, the supreme embodiment of this fundamental truth, has been a fountain of pride and joy to Conservative Jews, but is also a source of frustration and conflict,

4. See the study of the opinions of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in Ira Robinson's "Because of Our Many Sins: The Contemporary Jewish World as Reflected in the Responsa of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, JUDAISM, 35 (1986): 35-46. For the evidence for his steadily less stringent rulings that we have assembled from Robinson, see JUDAISM, cited in the next note.

due to the discrimination suffered at the hands of the “religious Establishment.”

Still, substantial progress has been registered. The Masorti movement has become a visible presence in Israeli society, many segments of which may find in its philosophy of Judaism the answer to their intellectual and spiritual needs. The movement has also established a base of growing significance in Latin America, including a rabbinical seminary in Argentina. As the result, Conservative Judaism has grown beyond the confines of North America and taken on the dimensions of a world movement.

The Nazi Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, together with the growth of the North American Jewish community are the three major events in the last two thousand years of Jewish experience. Nevertheless, the general historian of the future may well point to another phenomenon as the most significant occurrence of the century. Its many aspects are variously described as feminism, women’s liberation, the sexual revolution, the new morality. Because of the massive needs of war production and the conscription of manpower for the armed forces during World War II, women were taken out of the home and brought into industry. A host of opportunities, temptations and excesses then came into being and we are wrestling with them to the present day, but the genie will never again be pushed back into the bottle.

Particularly disquieting is the weakening of the family, hitherto regarded as the bulwark of a stable society. The far-reaching change in the socio-economic position of women, and what was at least equally significant, women’s perception of themselves and of their position relative to men, undermined centuries-old traditions of the relations of the sexes. The old assumptions of masculine superiority and domination were shaken, and the barriers against women’s equality in all sectors of society were breached one by one, not always without pitched battles and human casualties.

The multiple revolutions in American society had a major impact upon the religious practice of Conservative Judaism. The problem did not exist for Reform Judaism, which had abandoned virtually all of the Halakhah. The existence of the issue of women’s rights was not recognized by Orthodoxy. Blessed with a dozen competing alignments, each claiming a monopoly on God’s favor, all fearful of being surpassed in piety by another group, all Orthodox factions were at one in regarding any change in the status of women as anathema. A few brave spirits who attempted a women’s minyan or called for action to relieve the plight of the *agunah* were stigmatized as being “outside the camp.”

It was Conservative Judaism, dedicated to the preservation of the Halakhah, but sensitive to the realities of the twentieth century, that initiated a long process designed to enlarge the rights and opportunities of women. While individuals and even groups might oppose each move, the

fact is that a clear line of change can be discerned in their role in Jewish religious life and law. A consistent effort has been made to enlarge their rights, and this has involved a constant engagement with the traditional Halakhah of the past, which had not envisaged this twentieth-century development.

Reference was made above to the surrender of segregated seating in the American synagogue, as a whole, and in Conservative synagogues in particular. Family pews did not come into existence as part of feminism; they preceeded the feminist movement by half a century. In fact, they were not adopted because of a concern for equality. There is no evidence that there was any discussion of family seating in either Reform or Conservative circles, nor, for that matter, in "modern Orthodoxy," when it, too, began to accomodate itself to *minhag America*. What happened was that *awira deAmerica*, "the American environment," changed the whole attitude toward the relation of the sexes. Family or mixed seating in Conservative synagogues became part and parcel of the North American scene without its ever having been validated halakhically. It is an example of *minhag mebhattel halakhah*, "a custom may overcome the law." Mixed seating was almost a reflex response to the American environment.⁵

Then came a series of steps which, far from being unconscious adaptations to the environment, were passionately debated, pro and con. It suffices to list them in chronological order. The introduction of the Bat Mizvah rite by Dr. Mordecai Kaplan in 1922 was followed, two decades later, in 1944, by the publication of the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, issued by the Joint Prayer-book Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue. Here the Preliminary Blessing recited by males, "who has not made me a woman" was replaced by the benediction, "who has made me in His image," appropriate to males and females alike.

Then came the calling of women to the Torah, a step sanctioned in 1955 by the Committee on Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, a practice for which the *Shulhan Arukh* gave more than a measure of support.⁶ In 1973, the counting of women for a *minyan*, which had no basis in the extant Halakhah — was voted as permissible by the Law Committee. To allow women to be called to the Torah, but to exclude them from the prayer quorum would be highly inconsistent and illogical. Though strongly opposed by some members of the rabbinate and (male) laity, these innovations were limited to those synagogues that chose to adopt them, the rulings being permissive and not obligatory.

Then came three major steps — the ordination of women by the Seminary in 1985, the admission of women to the Rabbinical Assembly in the same year, followed by the certification, by the Seminary, of women as

5. See "Minhag America: Seating in the Synagogue," JUDAISM, 35 (1987): 47-53.

6. See *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim*, sec. 282, par. 3, and the gloss by the *Rema*: "Women (and minors) may be added (to others called to the Torah), but not all the *Aliyot* should be given to them."

cantors in 1987. While it may be argued that there are greater Halakhic difficulties with women cantors than with women rabbis, it is significant that the last-named step has created no such furor as was the case with women's ordination.

An even more substantial ethical problem for traditional Judaism has been the status of the *agunah*. The proportions of this tragedy have greatly increased in modern times and the number of *agunot* in Israel and the Diaspora is now estimated in the thousands. The gravity of the situation, rooted in the Halakhic provision that gives the initiative for a divorce only to the husband, has been augmented by the conditions of modern life — the high socio-economic status and geographical mobility of modern Jews on the one hand, and the absence of authority in the Jewish community on the other.

While a few Orthodox rabbis have been genuinely concerned with this tragedy, none of them has undertaken any remedial actions. As for the Orthodox organizations, lay or rabbinic, not even the most "modern" among them have been ready to use the resources available in the Halakhah to ameliorate the plight of the *agunah*, perhaps because they are frightened by the psychological "reign of terror" from the extreme elements on their right.

Nothing does more honor to Conservative Judaism than the history of its efforts through the years to right this wrong. The Epstein proposal of the forties and the Lieberman *ketubbah* in the fifties, were both adopted and put into practice. Because of the difficulties involved in their implementation, the Rabbinical Assembly adopted the Talmudic principle of *hafka'at Kiddushin*, "annulment of the marriage," to be invoked only when all other means fail. It cannot be over-emphasized that all of these procedures fall within the parameters of the traditional Halakhah.

It is equally significant for the essential spirit of the movement that all of these methods for dealing with the *agunah* exhibit an unmistakable pattern. Whether one does or does not approve of them, a clear goal underlies them all — the achievement of equality for women and the removal of their disabilities in Jewish law and practice. No phrase is more popular in Conservative ranks today than "the halakhic process." It should not be necessary to remind oneself that "process" implies movement and is not a synonym for immobility.

Progress in liturgy characterizes the various prayer books that have come out. The *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, published in 1945, broke new ground in several directions. It modified the Preliminary Blessings, so that they would no longer assign an inferior role to women, as is the case with the traditional text. It adopted the change in tense in the Musaf introduced by Rabbi Jacob Kohn, as well as a few other changes. A phrase in the *Yekum purkan* was augmented by three words which explicitly recognize that support for the State of Israel is a cardinal *mizvah* in our age, by invoking God's blessing "on all those who occupy themselves with the

needs of the community and the upbuilding of the land of Israel.” In the new *Sim Shalom Siddur*, in the prayer for peace, the word *ba’olam*, “in the world,” was inserted, borrowed from Saadiah’s *Siddur*, thus encompassing the entire human race in the blessing. In brief, the Prayer Book Commission labored to make certain that in prayer what was meant was said, and what was said was meant. *Sim Shalom* goes further in sanctioning variations in the text, but it, too, preserves the traditional character of the *Siddur* and the *Maḥzor*.⁷

Actually, the process at work in Conservative Judaism has been in operation in Judaism as a whole from the biblical period through the Mishnaic, Talmudic and Gaonic eras, even during the Middle Ages and in the modern period. Jewish law has never been static. True, the process of the adjustment of law to life was not always a pacific enterprise and diversity in views and practice often produced bitter conflict, witness the Maimonidean controversy, the Sabbatarian disaster and the Hasidim-Mitnaggedim conflict.

In the two centuries since the Emancipation, the custodians of tradition, with few exceptions, have been convinced that erecting a stone-wall against the modern age would be more effective than building a window. But even Orthodoxy has been powerless against the massive tide of change — social, economic, political, cultural and ideological. As the writings of its greatest spokesmen reveal, it has been compelled to adopt some measures, miniscule, to be sure, when confronted by the major forces of modern life and thought.

It is not to be inferred from what has been said above that change is automatically a good and that loyalty to the *status quo* necessarily an evil. On the contrary, pluralism — the tension between opposing tendencies, or, if you will, the system of checks and balances — is not merely an unfortunate though unavoidable fact of life, but a positive value to be maintained and cherished. Today, the democratic ethos, perhaps the greatest contribution of the modern era to mankind, recognizes not only that differences of attitudes are inevitable in an environment of freedom, but that divergences are the essential instruments of progress. Even those who argue, mistakenly, I believe, that pluralism is not a value, cannot deny that pluralism is a reality and nowhere more than in the Conservative movement.

But how can pluralism be reconciled with process? The movement must, of necessity, exhibit a pattern, a direction. It surely cannot require the exclusion of those unable to accept some of the positions arrived at by

7. The papers written by the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary on the subject of women’s ordination as rabbis are collected in a volume edited by Simon Greenberg, scheduled to appear this year. My own contribution, included in this volume, originally appeared in *Midstream* (September 1980: 25-32). It deals with the halakhic and extra-halakhic objections raised against the practice, and presents a halakhic, ethical, and pragmatic rationale for it.

the majority. How can one safeguard the right of a minority to reject decisions reached? Is it possible or ethically desirable to compel obedience in violation of conscience? I believe that the solution to the dilemma may be suggested by the history of the movement.⁸

When Conservative Judaism is studied diachronically, the role of “process” is undeniable; though the tempo of change is not uniform, the direction is clear. But the movement may, indeed should also, be observed synchronically, and here the role of pluralism emerges. Both rabbis and laymen may decide to take their stand with an earlier stage in the history of the movement. Any Conservative Jew has the right to say, “I find the position of Frankel entirely adequate, religiously and intellectually, and I find later stages unacceptable.” In truth, there are honored members of the Rabbinical Assembly and important congregations in the United Synagogue who maintain segregated seating; their legitimacy is not subject to question.

Similarly, there are Conservative Jews, both lay and rabbinic, whose religious views and practices find stage two — the Schechter era — thoroughly congenial. They accept mixed pews, but are opposed to some, or all, of the innovations with regard to the role of women in the synagogue. Their legitimate position in Conservative Judaism is equally unassailable. The new prayer book, *Sim Shalom*, has won high praise in many quarters, but many Conservative Jews, both rabbis and laymen, are perfectly comfortable with the earlier 1945 prayer-book and less so with its more recent successor.

Actually, the role of conservatives (with a small c), when they are in the minority, which, of course, is not always the case, is validated, not merely by the principle of pluralism, but also by the workings of process; it is indispensable for the health of the body politic as a whole. When an innovation is proposed, the objections of those opposed to it may be that it is completely ill-advised, or premature, or poorly structured. The ensuing discussion may, therefore, lead to the rejection of the proposal *in toto*, or its postponement, or its modification. Whatever the outcome, both participating groups have made a creative contribution, provided that the discussion is carried on as a dialogue and not as a diatribe.

Two other *caveats* are in order. To adopt Frankel or Schechter’s position in 1987 is entirely legitimate. But no one has the right to assume to know what Frankel or Schechter would have said under present circumstances. Second, in a given case, the legitimacy of both the conservators and the innovators is protected by the acceptance of pluralism as valid. That, however, cannot be permitted to obscure the reality of a clear line of development in a given area, proof-positive of process at work. This is evident in the growing recognition of the rights of women and the exten-

8. The subject is treated in an as-yet-unpublished book. See my paper, “A New Kind of Hostage,” *Moment* (April, 1987): 57-61.

sion of their roles in the synagogue, as in society as a whole. In sum, both pluralism and process are alive and well in Conservative Judaism. What is more, only when both are vital and functioning can the vitality of the movement be assured.

In this context, I am reminded of a conversation that I had many years ago with Dr. James A. Pike, later a Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church. At that time he was chairman of the Department of Religion at Columbia University and was engaged in a pioneering venture that revolutionized the teaching of religion on college campuses, a contribution which has been all but forgotten.

Hitherto, courses on religion, when they were offered at all, were generally taught by a Protestant scholar or minister who spoke from the vantage point of his faith, with one or two sessions at the end devoted to non-Protestant religions. Dr. Pike came up with the notion that every religious tradition should be taught in an ecumenical and objective spirit by a competent scholar who was himself committed to the tradition, so that he could interpret it with sympathy as well as objectivity.

During our discussion Pike asked me about my own conception of Judaism. When I gave him a thumb nail description of Conservative Judaism (as I understood it) he said, "I see that Episcopalianism occupies the center position in Christianity that Conservatism occupies in the Jewish spectrum." The resemblances go further: on the one hand, both traditions have an elaborate ritualistic structure and, on the other, both exhibit considerable freedom of thought with regard to doctrine in theology and ethics.

His comment brought to mind a historical event. In the middle of the nineteenth century there were sensitive spirits in the Anglican Church in Britain who were unhappy with what they thought was the absence of religious fervor in personal life. As a result, a group of laymen and clergy banded together in the Oxford Movement to revitalize the Anglican liturgy and ritual, in order to stimulate spirituality among the communicants. The Oxford Movement had varied consequences. Some of the extreme Anglo-Catholics ultimately went over to Roman Catholicism, the most famous example being John Henry Newman, later a Cardinal, but these were the exceptions. By and large the movement proved a salutary development for Anglicanism because it introduced a deeper piety into the lives of many of its adherents.

No analogy is ever perfect, but it seems to me that, *mutatis mutandis*, an analogous role in Conservative Judaism is being played by those who find themselves to the right of the mainstream. That the Rabbinical Assembly convention in 1987, like earlier ones, devoted so much attention to the content and direction of Conservative Judaism is due, in substantial measure, to its right-minded colleagues. This contribution will become increasingly valuable if discussions take place in an atmosphere of *pilpul hatalmidim*, in fraternity and not in confrontation.

If invective is to be replaced by dialogue, and hostility to those who differ by hospitality to truth, whatever its source, one more basic ingredient is indispensable. Indeed, without it, the rabbi may be a spell-binder, a functionary, an administrator, a politician, but he will not be a rabbi.

It is perhaps inevitable that the rabbinate in the closing decades of the twentieth century is becoming increasingly professionalized. The need for more psychological expertise in dealing with personal problems, running the gamut from pediatrics to geriatrics, calls for unique training, if only that the rabbi may know where he can help and where he should refer the case to a specialist. He needs knowledge and skills in group dynamics for a pluralistic society. He needs to develop his faculties in the art of speaking both from the pulpit and from the platform. Hence, the pressures on the Seminary curriculum and, later, on the rabbi's program, are intense. Temptation is great to make room for "relevant" and "practical" courses by attenuating the traditional branches of study, like Bible and Talmud, as well as the results of modern, historical and critical scholarship which have been introduced in modern seminaries. The temptation is great, but it must be resisted at all costs. If the rabbi loses contact with the sources of the tradition and the modern understanding of its meaning, he loses his *raison d'être*, his patent of authority among his people. Congregants today, in increasing measure, are educated, alert and sensitive to genuine scholarship and its relevance for them and their contemporaries. With Torah, all that the rabbi knows takes on meaning; without it he has nothing.

I am well aware of the extraordinary pressures under which the modern rabbi lives — a fact tragically illustrated by the increased numbers of burnouts in rabbinic ranks. Nevertheless, the stark truth remains that a rabbi who does not make the study of Torah part of his regular regimen will become either a pious fool or an impious charlatan. Jewish folk wisdom revealed a fundamental truth in describing a scholar by the term *lamdan*. It means not a "knower," but a "learner." What we *know* may be inert and useless, but what we *learn* is fresh and alive.

In spite of the prophetic doom pronounced upon the movement, nobody seems to believe in Conservative Judaism except the people. There is a tremendous interest in Conservative Judaism among the laity, including our youth, who are seeking ways and means to give substance to their Jewish living. That imposes a special obligation upon the rabbis, a duty which is both a privilege and a joy: the personal study by the rabbi of *torah lishmah*, not for professional purposes for for personal enrichment. Not every rabbi needs to be an academician, but everyone should be a life-long student of Torah and should develop expertise in at least one area of Jewish learning. Competence in one field brings a measure of confidence and critical judgment applicable everywhere. As the old proverb puts it, "I fear the master of one book."

Rabbis who carry on Jewish studies regularly will win the respect and

the loyalty of men and women already in our movement. What is more, they will attract many who now stand outside our ranks and call themselves by many labels, though they belong with us. They will find in Conservative Judaism that faith can go hand in hand with intelligence, that piety is compatible with tolerance and that true loyalty to our people and its tradition leads directly to devotion to humanity.

Though we are not prophets, we are their descendants and, like them, we must stand with our feet firmly planted in our own country, but our hearts must embrace the world. It is not enough for us to labor for the survival of Judaism; it must be a Judaism worthy of survival.

In Observance

ROLAND TROPE

I light eight candles with a ninth.
 In self-illumination their reflected
 Partners dance to the end of their life.
 I did not mean to celebrate alone.
 I bless them, and wait from desire
 To follow their smoke trails home.

ROLAND TROPE is a poet, a linguist, and a lawyer.

Joseph and his Brothers: A Paradigm for Repentance

SOL SCHIMMEL

THE BIBLICAL STORY OF JOSEPH AND HIS brothers is the final chapter in the dramatic saga of Jacob and his family, and constitutes a major portion of the Book of Genesis. The history of Jacob and his interactions with his parents, spouses, concubines, siblings and children resounds with personal significance to anyone who has experienced the tender emotions and the bitter conflicts of family life. Whoever has known a deep and satisfying love of a spouse or disappointment and frustration in a marital relationship; whoever has experienced caring concern for a sibling or envy and hatred of a brother or sister perceived as a rival or favored child; whoever has felt respect and love for a parent or harbored hostility and callous disregard toward a father or mother; whoever has looked upon a child with pride and joy or has wept within for a son or daughter gone astray or in pain — whoever has experienced any of these emotions can surely identify with one or another of the characters who participate in the family drama of Jacob.

A particularly powerful complex of emotions that are central to the Joseph story are guilt, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as responses to hatred and aggression. These emotions need to be considered from two perspectives, that of the victim and that of the perpetrator. In order to understand these emotions better we have first to consider the various effects of interpersonal sins.

Generally speaking, every sin committed by one person against another has three deleterious effects in the human sphere.

First, the malicious intention followed by the malicious act results in, or signifies, a moral degeneration of the sinner, him/ or her/self. Having executed my evil intention I am now an inherently less worthy individual.

Second, I have caused pain, insult or injury by the immoral act that I have perpetrated upon my victim. My behavior, or my failure to act, has inflicted suffering on another.

Third, above and beyond the specific pain or suffering that I have inflicted, I have breached a human relationship. A consequence of my sin is that there is now a net increase in the quantity or level of bitterness, hatred and ill-will in my familial or social setting. Not only does the victim bear me a grudge or feel resentful, but, usually, friends and family are affected by the process as well, so that many human relationships that,

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before my sin, were amicable, or at least neutral, have now become infected with negative affect.

If these are the three effects of sinning against my fellow human being, then complete repentance requires a rectification of each of these effects.

First the sinner must re-instate his moral level to at least the level where he was prior to having committed the sin.

Generally, this involves recognition and acknowledgement of the sin, remorse for having committed it, and the ability to be able to face a situation similar in its pressures, temptations, seductions and emotional tenor to the situation in which the sin was originally committed — but this time without succumbing. Recognition and the acknowledgement of one's sin and remorse for it, constitute guilt. Justifiable, or warranted guilt — unlike neurotic or irrational guilt — is, from the perspective of Judaism, an emotion that is necessary and desirable as a stage in the process of repentance.

Second, the sinner must repair the specific pain or damage — physical or psychological — that he has caused. Often this is impossible. The victim may have died or is no longer accessible. A major concern of Jewish moralists was how to deal with guilt and repentance where reparation is no longer objectively possible. What, if anything, can be done to address the psychological needs of the guilt-ridden sinner and how can the requirements of true repentance be satisfied in such circumstances?

Third, the sinner must do what he can to heal the breaches in the personal relationships that he has caused by his sinful behavior. He is required to work actively towards an authentic personal reconciliation with his victim and the others who have been affected by his behavior.

In the light of the above analysis we now turn to the story of Joseph and his brothers. The details of the story of Joseph's confrontation and eventual reconciliation with his brothers pose many textual and conceptual problems for which the commentators have suggested a variety of solutions. Here I wish to consider only two of the questions that have been raised and try to resolve them, at least partially, in terms of the nature of sin and repentance.

What is Joseph's purpose in subjecting his brothers to false accusations, harassment, anxiety, imprisonment and an extra round-trip journey to Canaan in order to bring Benjamin to Egypt? Is this a form of vengeance or does Joseph have some other end in mind? Given Joseph's forgiving behavior and expressions of brotherly affection and concern later in the story, it does not seem very plausible to ascribe the motive of vengeance as the reason for his actions.

Secondly, why, indeed, doesn't Joseph exact punishment from his brothers? Wouldn't that be the most natural reaction to having been nearly murdered and finally kidnapped and sold into slavery by those from whom such vicious behavior would be least expected?

The answer to the second question seems to be provided by the biblical text itself, but the very answer to the second question only strengthens the first. We read in Genesis:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you. It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. God has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt (45:4-8).

Now, if Joseph really believed that his being sold by his brothers into captivity was a divinely preordained act, why was it necessary or even proper to subject them and his father to the prolonged anguish reported in Genesis 42-44? This question, in generalized form, is a central one in Jewish philosophy and theology. If history is guided by a Divine Will — and history is the cumulative sequence of human actions — how can individuals be held accountable for their behavior and its consequences? The question may be posed in a modern, secularized form. As life sciences and social sciences progressively discover determinants of human feeling, thought and action, to the point of fairly precise prediction and control over them (as they seem to be doing at a rapid pace) — must we progressively diminish the domain of human behavior to which we ascribe personal responsibility and moral accountability? These general philosophical questions, fascinating and important as they are, though incipient in the Joseph story, will not be discussed here. Let us return to the concrete case of Joseph and his brothers.

In response to our first question — what is the purpose of Joseph's behavior towards his brothers — the most plausible interpretation offered by the commentators is that Joseph wants to subject his brothers to an experiential situation similar to the one that they faced when they committed their crime against him. This will provide them with an opportunity to repent and will test whether they, indeed, do so. The key elements that defined their situation when they sold Joseph into slavery were the following: an opportunity to be rid of a favored, younger son, who was also the son of their father's favored wife — who was the rival of their own mother. Their crime involved vicious cruelty towards their brother as well as the most callous insensitivity to their father's anguish — an anguish which they themselves had brought upon him.

Now, when the brothers appear before Joseph in Egypt he acts so as to produce an analogous situation. Benjamin, the younger, favored son of the favored wife is imprisoned and, from the perspective of the brothers, is in mortal danger. Their father is once again anxious for a beloved

son and would be physically and psychologically devastated were any harm to befall him.

This time, however, the brothers are in no way directly responsible for the situation. With heavy hearts, but in good conscience, they could return to Canaan and attribute the evil that had occurred to the cruel Egyptian despot. Objectively, they cannot save Benjamin or even remain with him. They have been instructed to return home. Yet, notwithstanding their moral right to leave Benjamin, how, in fact, do they respond? In the person of Judah, their representative, the brothers not only do not passively abandon Benjamin, or even insist only on remaining in the vicinity, but actually offer to exchange places with him. Judah, their leader, is willing, if necessary, to be imprisoned or put to death in order to rescue Benjamin and to prevent the anguish that this abandonment would bring upon their father. The brothers, thus, have indeed undergone at least the first stage of repentance. Earlier in the sequence of events they recognized and acknowledged their guilt, as we read:

They said to one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why distress has come upon us." Then Reuben spoke up and said to them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy?' But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood" (Genesis: 42:21-22).

In Chapter 44, Judah passionately pleads:

"Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us — since his own life is so bound up with his — when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.' Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!" (30-34).

The brothers have, indeed, returned to the moral state in which they were prior to their dastardly crime against Joseph.

Let us now consider Joseph. Our sages refer to him as Joseph the Zaddik. I do not think that he got this appellation solely because of his ability to resist the seductions of the wife of Potiphar. His piety is reflected in this episode as well. How rare is the person who would be more concerned about the moral rehabilitation of an individual who has inflicted harm, degradation or injury upon him than with vengeance against the aggressor! Joseph's piety resides in this — he would rather see his enemies purified of their sinfulness than punish them for it. This does not mean "turning the other cheek," since it postulates true repentance of the sinner as a prerequisite for forgiving him. However, it does negate the bearing of a grudge and the taking of revenge. This forbearance is one of the attributes of God who, we are told by the prophets, does not want the sin-

ner to die but, rather, to turn away from his sin so that he may live. How much family and social conflict would be attenuated if this attitude towards others with whom we have had unpleasant interactions would guide our responses to insult and injury! At a deeper level of reflection, what this value is saying is that the hurt, pain and injury which you caused me, as unfortunate as they are — are less significant than the fact that you have degenerated from your humanity by doing evil. And the most important task incumbent upon me, the victim, in response to your, the sinner's, evil, is to try to make you good again rather than to avenge my hurt.

Let us return to the brothers. Joseph has forgiven them, according to Genesis 45, and has extended the hand of reconciliation. Yet we read the following in Genesis 50:15-21:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!" So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.

His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result — the survival of many people. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Why do the brothers question the sincerity of Joseph's magnanimity? Why do they suggest that he still harbors a grudge and will avenge the torment and degradation to which they had subjected him? After all, haven't they demonstrated to him already that they are sincere penitents? The answer, I believe, lies in the notion of reparation. Have the brothers repented in the fullest sense of the concept of repentance? Clearly they have not. Although they have undergone a transformation of character, the first of the three stages of repentance, there yet remains reparation of the damage that they have caused and the initiation of personal reconciliation. The brothers in no way made up to Joseph for the years of slavery that their actions brought upon him. In fact, given his present position of power and affluence, relative to their political and economic dependence upon him, there is little that they can offer in reparation. And it is Joseph who offers the hand of reconciliation rather than they who initiate the process. The brothers, then, aware of the incompleteness of their repentance, have good reason to fear the emergence of hostility on the part of Joseph — particularly after the death of their father, whose presence might have acted as a temporary inhibition on his vengeance. It was to alleviate the remaining and appropriate guilt and fear that his brothers experienced at their not having undergone or compensated for the objec-

tive and prolonged sufferings that they had inflicted upon him that Joseph had said to them earlier that it was God who had sent him to Egypt rather than they who had sold him there. He reiterates now, in abbreviated form, the message of comfort that he had given them before. He had, in effect, said to them that, objectively speaking, I really haven't suffered as much as you imagine that I did. On the contrary, my experiences in Egypt have basically been positive ones because I was destined by God to rise to prominence and influence so that both Egypt and Israel would survive the famine. In fact, he says, I wasn't sold into slavery, but, rather, I was sent on a mission. And, objectively speaking, it is true that Joseph's experiences in Egypt, though having their bad moments, are, according to the tone of the Biblical text, not excessively unpleasant or degrading, even during the period of his slavery and captivity and, of course, are not so in his present royal position. These earlier words of Joseph, restated again after his father's death, are capable of alleviating the anxiety of his brothers because they address themselves to their core concern about the fundamental inadequacy of their repentance.

Notwithstanding the brothers' first stage of repentance and Joseph's words to the effect that the second stage of repentance is not really necessary because no serious harm was caused, I think that the story, as related in the Torah and in some later rabbinic texts, certainly does leave us with the impression that the brothers have not really met all of the requirements of repentance towards Joseph. An accusatory finger remains pointed at them and there hovers over them a lingering guilt. Here is not the place to pursue how this theme is reflected in rabbinic and post-rabbinic literature. Let me only note that it is clearly articulated in the medieval *piyyut* about the Ten Martyrs who were put to death by the Romans. We recite it in the Yom Kippur liturgy, quoting the Roman tyrant who "justifies" his murderous cruelty by saying to the ten martyrs:

Where are your fathers who sold their brother to a caravan of Ishmaelites and bartered him for shoes? . . . If they were alive, I would convict them in your presence, but now it is you who must atone for the iniquity of your fathers.

*Hymn of Glory**

Melodies I weave, songs I sweetly sing;
longing for Your Presence, to You I yearn to cling.

In Your shelter would my soul delight to dwell,
to grasp Your mystery, captured by Your spell.

Whenever I speak of Your glory so resplendent,
my heart yearns deeply for Your love
transcendent.

Thus I glorify You in speech as in song,
declaring with my love: to You do I belong.

Without having seen You I declare Your praise;
without having known You I laud You and Your
ways.

To Your assembled servants and in Your prophets'
speech,
You alluded to Your glory which is beyond our
reach.

The scope of Your greatness and the marvel of
Your strength
are reflected in Your actions all described at
length.

They have imagined You, but never as You are;
they tell of Your deeds, to portray You from afar.

They speak of You with parables in countless
varied visions,
while You remain as One throughout all of their
renditions.

They try to portray You as one now young, now old,
with hair now dark, now gray, as if it could be told.
Youth and force in battle, old age on judgment day;
like a seasoned warrior, with strength He clears
the way.

He wears triumph as a helmet on His head,
His power and holiness have stood Him in good
stead.

His head is covered with dawn-dew bathed in light,
His locks of hair are covered with dewdrops of the
night.

He takes pride in me, the source of His delight;
and He will be my splendor whose praise I will recite.
His head is envisioned as pure and beaten gold,
bearing His holy name in letters large and bold.
With kindness and dignity, with splendor that they
share,

His people Israel crown Him with their prayer.

Adorned is His head with the curly locks of youth,
black as a raven. He is splendid as the truth.

Nothing is more precious among all His good
pleasures
than Zion, seat of splendor, chief among His
treasures.

His cherished people adorn Him as a crown,
a royal diadem of beauty and renown.

In mutual devotion, in each other we glorify;
I know that He is near when unto Him I cry.

Radiant and ruddy, His garments red as wine,
He compresses sinning nations as grapes on a vine.

The knot of His tefillin He showed to Moses,
humble, wise;
the Lord's vision and His ways revealed only to his
eyes.

Exalting the humble, enthroned upon their praise,
He takes pleasure in His people, exalted through
their ways.

Your word is based on truth from the start of all
Creation;
since we always seek You, seek the welfare of our
nation.

Cherish my plentitude of song as Your own;
may my verses be permitted to approach Your
throne.

My praise I humbly offer as a crown upon Your
head;
we no longer offer incense, accept my prayer
instead.

May the words of this my song be precious as the
psalter
once offered in the Temple with sacrifice upon the
altar.

May my prayer rise to the Creator of the miracle of
birth,
Master of beginnings whose might and justice fill
the earth.

And when I chant my prayer, may You greet it with
assent;
the spirit of ancient offerings to You is my intent.
May You find sweet and pleasing my prayer and
my songs;
my soul goes out in yearning, for You alone it
longs.

* Excerpted, by permission, from *Siddur Sim Shalom*, ed. Jules Harlow.

Poetry and Pietism: The “Hymn of Glory”

ISMAR SCHORSCH

THE “HYMN OF GLORY” (*Shir ha-Kavod*) HAS long been the victim of benign neglect in the Conservative synagogue. The bold shift in location from the end of *Musaf* to the beginning of *Shaharit*, introduced by the *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook* in 1946, failed to generate much interest. In truth, the change was halfhearted; the editors, despite their professed determination for integrity, retained the archaic translation of Israel Zangwill, which managed to finesse the omission of some eight lines of the original that were deemed to be offensive. That ambivalence has finally been laid to rest by Jules Harlow in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, where the Hebrew text — still part of the preliminary prayers — is now graced with a splendid English rendition that captures the rhyme and rhythm of the original without diluting its bracing anthropomorphisms. Both faithful and felicitous, the translation beckons us to ponder the meaning of this poem.¹

The “Hymn of Glory” was no less troublesome to our medieval ancestors. Its entry into the Ashkenazi rite was not uncontested and, in the end, it was restricted to a spot in the service where religious energy, concentration, and discipline flag, if not vanish. Indeed, if we bear in mind the usual manner of recitation — responsively, with a child cantor, to a jarringly sprightly tune — we soon realize that the traditional synagogue did everything to neutralize the numinous quality of the piece. Yet, the “Hymn of Glory” is not to be confused with the religious ditties tacked on at the end of the Passover seder to regain the attention of children drifting off to sleep. On the contrary, it is a profound and anxious statement of faith that deserves to be confronted when our religious power is fully mobilized.

There is no reason to dismiss the traditional ascription of authorship to Rabbi Judah the Pietist. If not the work of his hands, the “Hymn of Glory” certainly derives from the extraordinary group of German Pietists of the twelfth and thirteenth century which he helped to inspire and fully reflects their concerns and orientation. Over the last two decades, the complementary scholarship of Joseph Dan and Ivan Marcus has brilliantly illuminated the unique combination of theosophy and pietism which

1. *Siddur Sim Shalom*, ed. by Rabbi Jules Harlow (New York, 1985), pp. 46-51. Unfortunately, the line beginning with “*amusim*” has been left untranslated, probably an oversight. The translations to be cited in this essay are those of Harlow.

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marked this small but influential circle of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.² Despite their generally sectarian bent, the Pietists did disseminate the core of their theological views and ascetic values in popular form. In consequence, the cycle of seven philosophic poems entitled the “Hymn of Unity” — one for each day of the week — and the “Hymn of Glory” for the Sabbath gradually gained acceptance in the liturgy, though only the latter can lay claim to being a religious masterpiece.

Structurally, the “Hymn of Glory” is an alphabetic acrostic of thirty-one lines, in which the first four and final three do not follow the alphabetic pattern. Moreover, there are two lines each for the letters “*resh*” and “*tav*.” Traditionally, the last line of the prayer is repeated in the synagogue, giving us actually a total of thirty-two lines, which is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word “*kavod*.” In other words, not the melody but the subject matter dictates the repetition: a poem plumbing the “glory” of God ought to correspond arithmetically to the object of its reflection. The vast literary legacy of the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* confirms that they were unduly attentive to the existence of numerical equivalents, an elusive layer of religious cognition. If we add to this partial structural analysis the sustained pattern of internal rhyme, we will begin to appreciate that we are dealing here with a well-wrought poem wedding religious passion to artistic form.

It is, of course, precisely the element of passion, the welter of explicit depictions of God which pervades the poem that has deterred its interpreters and translators alike. Yet a careful reading will readily suggest that our pious poet is never overwhelmed by sheer emotion. The “Hymn of Glory” is a complex work that vibrates with tension. Its author struggles to reconcile the need for God’s nearness with a high degree of intellectual sophistication and the doubts raised by the trauma of the Crusades with the promises of tradition. Along the way his voice shifts from the personal to the communal, making of the poem a two-tiered affair. And, throughout, the mode of expression is exegetical, with ancient texts and tropes made to resonate with contemporary meaning.

The poet opens with a resounding declaration of love for God. His verbal artistry is to be read as the outpouring of a lifelong fascination with God. The allusion to the opening lines of Psalm 42 serves to amplify the emotional intensity. Appropriately enough, he speaks in the first person while addressing God in the second. But the intimate tone is suddenly altered with a blast of self-consciousness. “Without having seen You I declare Your praise; / without having known You I laud You and Your ways.” The yearning of the heart quavers before the knowledge of the mind. Even the Prophets could not penetrate the ineffable and indescribable reality of God. Truth is forever veiled in metaphor, though, for all its

2. Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidim* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1968); Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society. The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden, 1981).

dazzling variety, prophetic language always points to one and the same divine being.

Having quieted his intellectual qualms, the poet resumes his spiritual quest, and we are treated to a cascade of concrete, physical descriptions of God. The initial disclaimer seems to have granted a license for uninhibited specificity. No matter what we say or where we stand, we are all equidistant from infinity. Nevertheless, it is important to note the poet's reserve; to slake his thirst he does not invent new metaphors. Rather, he is content to draw from the repertoire sanctified by tradition, especially what is found in the erotic fifth chapter of the Song of Songs. Our poet, then, appears to be a philosophic pietist whose epistemological modesty turns into verbal extravagance. The tension between the heart and the mind seems to be resolved through the artifice of metaphoric language.

The tension, indeed, is to be found in the biblical chapter on which our poem rests. The "Hymn of Glory," as its very name implies, is a commentary on chapter 33 of the book of Exodus, which treats of God's nature (*kavod*), but in a twofold fashion not untypical for the Bible. That memorable chapter offers two disparate views of God's accessibility to man. According to the first one, whenever Moses entered the Tent of Meeting, which had been removed from the Israelite camp after the incident of the golden calf, "the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another" (33:11). Any doubt about the immediacy of that description is diffused by the amplification appended by the book of Numbers. God rebukes Miriam and Aaron for their challenge to Moses' authority by stressing the uniqueness of His relationship with Moses. "With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord" (12:8), a passage which prompted the Rabbis to observe that, "while all the Prophets saw through unclear glass, Moses saw through highly polished glass."³

Yet, according to the second view of chapter 33, such immediacy of God's presence is beyond human ken. In need of reassurance that God still cared for Israel after its infidelity, Moses entreated Him: "Oh, let me behold Your Presence! (*kevodekha*)" (33:18). But God is less than forthcoming: "You cannot see My face for man may not see Me and live" (33:20). With exquisite delicateness, the Bible goes on to narrate how Moses, from a crevice in the rock, is afforded only a fleeting glimpse of God's back. The philosophic import is sobering; our vision is obscured and our knowledge derivative. Hence the religious conflict of our commentary, the "Hymn of Glory," echoes in the underlying biblical text itself.

However, the biblical editors were less discomforted by contradictions than were later generations. The incredible diversity of the Hebrew canon is a tribute to their robust tolerance for disagreement. The effer-

3. *Vayikra Rabba* 1:11.

vescent canvas of biblical and rabbinic anthropomorphism does not become an intractable problem for Jewish thought until the Middle Ages. Exposure to Greek philosophy through the medium of Islamic culture first stimulates the growth of a new religious sensibility among Jews that takes offense at the profusion of anthropomorphism in their sacred texts. Remarkably, the Pietists of Germany, far removed from the orbit of Islam but deeply affected by the thinking of Saadiah Gaon and Abraham ibn Ezra, became absorbed in a defense of God's indivisible and unknowable unity. The wearisome repetitiveness of the "Hymn of Unity" attests to their determination on this issue.

At the same time, they were not prepared to sacrifice the experiential realm on the altar of philosophic integrity. Their own spiritual lives, as well as the Bible itself — a book pulsating with the evidence of divine-human interaction — confirmed the reality of God's nearness. And, so, they did not choose the pristine if sterile path of "negative theology" (what God is not) but, rather, filled the void between man's fragile limitedness and God's transcendent grandeur with the presence of the "*Kavod*." Either created by God or emanating from Him, the "*Kavod*" represents God's intermediary to mankind. The Pietists reified God's Glory. It is that intermediary that Moses asked to be shown in chapter 33 of Exodus, and it is not accidental that the chapter plays a central role in the theological discourse of the Pietists. The anthropomorphic language of the Bible, then, is reduced to the record of the prophetic experience of God's Glory. Revelation becomes the mediation of God's will through the agency of the "*Kavod*."⁴

Against this theological background, the "Hymn of Glory" should be read as a poem about the "*Kavod*." The plenitude of human attributions is not meant to depict God, who remains hidden, but His agent, who provides man with the link to the divine. Artfully the poet weaves into the first six lines of his work five forms of the root of "*Kavod*," as if to alert us that the poem is not about God Himself but, rather, about the way He relates to His people. The invention of the "*Kavod*," like that of the "*Shekhinah*" by the Rabbis, the Active Intellect by Maimonides, and the "*Sefirot*" by the Spanish Kabbalists, facilitated a fertile reconciliation between intellectual integrity and religious passion.

To this point we have spoken of the "Hymn of Glory" as the monologue of a solitary believer. The intimate use of personal pronouns conjures up an I-Thou relationship. But as the poet launches into his portrayal of God's Glory, there is a noticeable shift to the third person singular. "Youth and force in battle, old age on judgment day; / like a seasoned warrior, with strength He clears the way." That shift is maintained until near the end of the poem, when the poet returns to the first and second persons. Moreover, the focus of the long middle section of the

4. See Dan, ch. 5.

poem has also changed. It soon becomes evident that the poet is no longer pondering his personal relationship to God, but, rather, the reciprocal ties between God (*ha-Kavod*) and Israel. "With kindness and dignity, with splendor that they share, / His people Israel crown Him with their prayer / . . . Nothing is more precious among all His good pleasures / than Zion, seat of splendor, chief among His treasures." In this context, when the poet uses the first person singular, it is Israel and not the poet who is speaking. The switch in pronouns and speakers subtly signals a change in subject matter.

So does the underlying biblical text. If the epiphany of Exodus informs the opening section of the "Hymn of Glory," it is the erotica of Song of Songs which interlaces the middle section. Chapter five, in particular, is a tender episode of lost opportunity. "Faint with love," a young woman pursues her departed lover into the night. Failing to find him and apprehended by the town's watchmen, she offers a vivid sketch of his physical virtues. The Rabbis, of course, conditioned by biblical thought and imagery, transmuted this romantic legacy into an allegory celebrating the love between God and Israel. Not only did the text limn the intensity of the relationship, it preserved the dialogue that passed between the partners.⁵ In brief, the book became a source of solace for a nation plagued by history, and it comes as no surprise that, when the author of our hymn assumes a national voicee, his speech becomes redolent with its vocabulary.

The ultimate concern of the poet is the fate of Israel. The effusion of anthropomorphisms is not meant to gratify the yearning of the mystic, but to firm up the faith of an oppressed community. The ancient covenant of law and love endures. Mutual affection continues to bind God and Israel. Whatever the vagaries of history, God still prizes and protects His chosen people. Behind the repeated affirmations lurks the fear of abandonment. In the final analysis, the "Hymn of Glory" is less about the nature of God's being than about the fidelity of His compassion. This is the deeper meaning of the poet's allusion to the rabbinic midrash as to what Moses might have seen when he beheld God's back from the crevice of the rock.⁶ "The knot of His tefillin He showed to Moses, humble, wise; / the Lord's vision and His ways revealed only to his eyes." But the Hebrew word "*kesher*" (knot) also implies the sense of connectedness and that connotation elegantly embodies the poem's essential message of consolation: God is, indeed, still connected to the fate of His people.⁷

The collective *angst* expressed by the poet accords with the downturn taken by Jewish history in the twelfth century. In little more than a hundred years, beginning with 1096, European Jewry absorbed the punishing fallout of four Crusades. While the loss of life was limited and decimated communi-

5. Gerson D. Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," in *The Samuel Friedland Lectures 1960-1966* (New York, 1966), pp. 1-21.

6. Bab. Tal. *Berakhot*, 7a.

7. See S. Baer, *Seder Avodat Yisrael* (Rödelheim, 1868), p. 251.

ties rebounded quickly, the legal status of Jews began to deteriorate and their sense of security to evaporate. An atmosphere charged with religious fanaticism cast Jews in the role of subversives, spawned the basest of canards, and erupted periodically into local acts of unbridled violence.⁸ The need for religious uplift grew with the degree of physical vulnerability.

The "Hymn of Glory," written somewhere around the turn of the twelfth century, addressed that need. It cut through the pall of the age by avowing the eternity of the relationship between God and Israel. What's more, the imagery of youth in the Song of Songs allowed the poet to accentuate the role of God as a man of war. Though he mentions the rabbinic image of God as hoary sage in moments of judgment, the poet dwells on His martial prowess. The vigor of youth excites hope for victory and vengeance. Adroitly, the poet plays on the Hebrew words "*adom*" (red) and "*Edom*" (the medieval term for Christendom) by combining phrases from the Song of Songs and Second Isaiah to evoke a blood-curdling picture of divine action against Israel's contemporary adversary. "Radiant and ruddy, His garments red as wine, / He compresses sinning nations (the Hebrew reads "*Edom*," a reading blurred by the translation) as grapes on a vine." The old covenant would never lapse, for the truth of Scripture is eternal.

With that assertion, the poet shifts back to addressing God once again in the second person. "Your word is based on truth from the start of all Creation; / since we always seek You, seek the welfare of our nation." The poetic rendition of inherited verities entails a form of religious affirmation; the validity of prophecy is impervious to history. As spokesman for his people, the poet prays that his handiwork may find favor in God's eyes. The poignancy of his appeal illustrates that transcendence is no impediment to intimacy.

The organization of the poem should now be clear. In the introductory and closing sections the poet addresses God directly and, therefore, uses the second person. He speaks as a learned and lonely pietist, profoundly aware of the chasm separating him from God. In the middle section, switching to the third person, he rehearses the manner of the relationship between the "*Kavod*" and the people of Israel as revealed in Scripture. As a whole, the poem is a gentle reminder to God, who appears to be momentarily indifferent, of commitments outstanding and unbroken. Once unpacked, it is seen to be a multi-layered but integrated work whose devout author did not flinch from facing the philosophical and historical challenges of his age. His response is a marvelous example of the creative exegesis which has long served Jews to retain the relevance of sacred texts as well as to mediate between ancient loyalties and new sensibilities.

8. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, IV (Philadelphia: JPS, 1957), ch. 21.

O God of Vengeance, Appear!

ERIC L. FRIEDLAND

THE *SIDDUR*, THE JEWISH PRAYERBOOK IN all of its untold transmutations, is a surprisingly functional gauge whereby we can measure the inner state of Jewish folk and faith. It is a rich tapestry of the Jewish spirit to which nearly every era has made its material contribution. Almost without fail, each new edition of the prayerbook makes some fresh disclosure about where we are at the moment theologically and attitudinally. Several of the prayerbooks that have latterly seen the light of day reflect the more obvious currentday issues, such as pride commingled with continual concern for Israel, the quest for an adequate theodicy in the aftermath of the Holocaust and, of course, the matter of sexism.

What is perhaps not quite so noticeable is a disturbing tendency of late, namely, a recrudescence of an old sentiment which is called in Hebrew *neqamah*, vengeance, and which makes its occasional appearance in the classical *Siddur*. For well over a century it was the norm in virtually all non-Orthodox prayerbooks to consider all references to *neqamah* in the standard ritual to be mean-spirited, jaundiced and, for that reason, unworthy of liturgical expression. There was good precedent in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

Such being the case, the standard operating procedure was either to delete or to dilute all retributive phraseology in Jewish prayer. Once in a while an offending Hebrew text might be altered. To illustrate, in the prayer, *Emet ve-Emunah*, which follows the *Shema* during any Evening Service, the verse "who wrought for us miracles and vengeance (*neqamah*) upon Pharaoh" turned into a cleaned-up, "He did wonders for us in the land of Egypt," as in the Reform *Gates of Prayer*.¹ In similar vein, a left-of-center Conservative prayerbook, *Seder Avodah* (ed. Max D. Klein, 1951), has a tempered conclusion to its special *Al ha-Nissim* prayer for Purim which reads

[Thou] didst save Thy people Israel from [Haman's] power, as we read: And unto the Jews in the Persian Empire there was light and joy, gladness and honor." Therefore do we give thanks to Thy great name in each and every year

1. The Reconstructionist prayerbooks simply removed the liturgical verse in question altogether.

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to replace the gloating traditional, “Thou didst frustrate [Haman’s] design, and return his recompense upon his own head; and they hanged him and his sons upon the gallows.” While leaving the latter Hebrew text intact, the current official Conservative weekday rites² euphemistically, if tamely, render the end of the same last sentence, “On the gallows he made for Mordecai, Haman, together with his sons, suffered death.”

For Purim again, as custom has it, before the reading from the Scroll of Esther, three blessings are recited. So, too, another is said without delay after the reading is completed. The wording, euphemistically, of the final blessing runs as follows:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who dost plead our cause, judge our suit and avenge our wrong, who renders retribution (*veha-noqem et niqmatenu*) to all that hate our soul, and on our behalf dealest out punishment to our adversaries. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who on behalf of Thy people Israel dealest out punishment to all their adversaries, O God, the Savior.

To obviate the problem of *neqamah* here, more than one rite would simply leave the blessing unsaid. Conforming with almost all of the non-Orthodox prayerbooks in Continental Europe, a British Reform prayerbook with strong traditional leanings, *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship* (1977), settles the difficulty by rewording the blessing in a more positive, non-retaliatory fashion:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who heard our plea and judged our cause. You are the one who has always saved us, our hope in every generation. May those who trust in You never be ashamed nor humiliated. Blessed are You Lord, the God who saves us.

We can now see how a fairly uniform pattern has taken hold in liberal prayerbooks to date. Wherefore, then, the subtle change that we are noticing these days from this practically established pattern? A case in point. A little while ago the Reform movement put out a fine work, *The Five Scrolls* (ed. Herbert A. Bronstein and Albert H. Friedlander, 1984), with each of the festival *Megillot* (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther) entire in Hebrew (including the *te’amim*, the cantillation notes) and a translation adapted from the restrained and flowing English of the mid-nineteenth century British *Jewish School and Family Bible*. In addition, worship services are supplied for each of the occasions when a scroll is read or chanted. Here, too, the editors and their helpers gave good account of themselves in treating stock liturgical materials in unexpected and often impelling ways. The blessings before the Scroll of Esther are all there, according to time-honored usage. So is the one afterwards, *unabridged!* The English rendition of the same (page 87) never lets on that, in the Hebrew, *neqamah* has returned with a vengeance, as it were.

A modern Orthodox prayerbook is not above putting the hex in no

2. *Weekday Prayer Book*, 1961, *The Bond of Life*, 1975, and *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 1985, all of them under the imprint of the Rabbinical Assembly of America.

uncertain terms upon those who inflicted unspeakable harm upon our people in days gone by. *The Complete Artscroll Siddur* (ed. Noson Scherman, 1984) is handsomely produced and includes a bountiful range of traditional commentaries on the prayers and, by extension, on all facets of Jewish religious life and calendar. The modern reader can learn much from its pages, whatever one's ideological proclivities. But despite the strengths of the *Artscroll Siddur*, it is even more aggressive with ugly punitive sentiments. In its version of *El Malei Rahamim* ("O God, who art full of compassion"), recited at Memorial Services on behalf of those martyred in the *Shoah*, the *Artscroll Siddur* works in an "innovative" phrase bound by parentheses, "through the hands of the German oppressors, may their name and memory be obliterated!" These words raise some difficult questions. Did not other nationalities have a hand in the unnameable atrocities of the infernal Kingdom of Night, *l'univers concentrationnaire*? Also — and here we are back to the notoriously difficult concept of collective guilt — is it just or fair to lump together indiscriminately all members of a people or a nation and to denounce — and curse — them wholesale before the bar of divine judgement? By using the word "German" rather than "Nazi," we curse also the likes of Thomas Mann, Paul Tillich, and the recently deceased Heinrich Böll, all of whom represented what Buber called the *humanus* battling the Hitlerite *contrahumanus*.

Historically, *neqamah* is not without its roots in our Hebrew Bible. Most of the references are somehow linked with the idea of justice (e.g., Isaiah 59:15b-18). There are, admittedly, instances where recompense sinks into vindictiveness and unremitting malice (e.g., Psalm 137:7-9). Though it is to be credited with breaking much new ground, the New Testament does not entirely break loose from such language either (see Matthew 21:41 and Hebrews 12:29).

Thankfully, one comes across innumerable examples of a high-minded disposition in both the Torah and the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the Apocrypha. A piece of remarkable and at-the-time revolutionary ancient legislation turns up in the Covenant Code within the Torah (Exodus 23:4-5):

If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the ass of the one who hates you lying under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it there; be sure you help him with it.

There is then the suggestive verse in Deuteronomy 23:8 - and surrounding verses - that deserves special consideration for another kind of light that it sheds. It bids us to refrain from loathing the Edomite and the Egyptian, sworn enemies of ancient Israel, i.e., not to harbor inimical feelings towards - nor bar for long from admission into the community of Israel - peoples who dealt cruelly with our biblical forebears.

With this admonition we move, in our ethical concern, from the individual sphere to the collective one, which latter is usually considered to be

more involved and problematic. The medieval commentators may have tacitly sensed the complexity of this shift from the realm of personal attitudes to the much larger domain of relations between societies, nations, etc., as witness Rashi's qualificatory, if strained, glosses on our verse:

Thou shalt not loathe the Edomite - entirely; and even though you are entitled to loathe him who came out with the sword to greet you; *thou shalt not loathe the Egyptian* - utterly; even though they threw your male offspring into the Nile. What is the reason? They were your hosts during a time of need.

Characteristically, Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary to the Pentateuch, *Terumat Zevi*,³ reminds us in this connection of the passage in the Mishnah (*Yadayim* 4:4) concerning the dislocation and blending of peoples during Sennacherib's conquests. The implication is that the demarcation made in our passage in the Torah between the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, etc., no longer applied since the time of the Assyrian invader's policy and work of miscegenation. However, relying on the Rabbinic view just cited, Hirsch understands it to mean that the descendants of these peoples qualify, as a result, as willing candidates for admission into the Jewish fold.

Could we not revert to a position closer to the *peshat* (plain sense of the text) and at the same time go Hirsch's universalism a step or two further 1) by not restricting acceptance solely for the purposes of religious conversion and 2) by dropping our grudges against the Ammonities and Moabites, *et al.*, (then and now!), in addition to the two already exempted in the Torah - commingled or no. As it stands, Deuteronomy 23:8 contains *in nuce* the promise of ending the stranglehold of long-drawn intergroup or international animosities, to wit, *neqamah* on the collective scale.

Further on in the Bible we read how, after Job's cronies have exhausted their suggested explanations for his tribulations, the book's author puts these words in the mouth of his patient/impatient hero as part of an impassioned self-defense (Job 31:29-30):

If I have rejoiced at my enemy's ruin
or exulted when trouble overtook him —
I have not allowed my mouth to sin
by asking for his life with a curse.

A parallel mindset can also be found in a book that never succeeded in being admitted to the canon of Scripture, *Ben Sira*, or *Ecclesiasticus*, in the Apocrypha. Even though it was originally written in pure Hebrew and came out decades earlier than the biblical book of Daniel, it is certainly no less doctrinally orthodox than any canonical book of the Hebrew Bible and is replete with noble utterances like these:

He that takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord,
and he will firmly establish his sins.
Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done
and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.

3. ed. by Ephraim Oratz, trans. Gertrude Hirschler, (New York: The Judaica Press, 1986).

Does a man harbor anger gainst another,
 and yet seek healing from the Lord?
 Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself,
 yet pray for his own sins?
 If he himself, being flesh, maintains wrath,
 who will make expiation for his sins?
 Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity;
 remember destruction and death, and be true to the
 commandments.
 Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbor;
 remember the covenant of the Most High and overlook ignorance.⁴

The Talmud, too, abounds in statements that are a close match to Jesus' radical admonition to love the enemy. Take the pithy, pungent simile of humankind's indivisibility in a comment on a verse in Leviticus (19:18) mentioned earlier: "[One who takes revenge or bears a grudge is as] one who in cutting meat sticks the knife in his hand and now goes ahead and sticks it in the other hand" (Yerushalmi *Nedarim* 9:15). In *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, the following gloss is offered to the verse, "Who is it that is most mighty?": "Mighty is the one who makes of an enemy a friend" (chapter 23). Further on in the same extracanonical talmudic tractate we have a memorable instruction in self-denial (chapter 41):

Rabbi Judah ben Tema used to say: Love Heaven and fear Heaven, tremble and rejoice in all the commandments. If you have done your neighbor a slight wrong, let it be in your eyes much; if you have done your neighbor much good, let it be in your eyes small. If your neighbor has done you slight good, let it be in your eyes much; if he has done you much evil, let it be in your eyes slight.

Perhaps the most often-quoted Talmudic passage of all on the theme of self-abnegation or sacrificial love (*Shabbat* 88b) is this one:

Of them who are oppressed and do not oppress, who are scorned and do not scorn in return, who act only from love, and gladly bear their sufferings, the Scripture says, "They who love Him are like the sun when it rises in its might."

This tradition of selflessness was to be expanded and enlarged upon throughout the Middle Ages. In medieval Germany a pietistic movement arose called *Hasidei Ashkenaz* ("the Saints of Germany") which engaged in devotional and theurgic mysticism. Despite similarities, these *Hasidim* are not to be confused with the zestier, not-quite-so-ascetic and more popular *Hasidim* of eighteenth-century Poland. One of German *Hasidim*'s leading lights, Eleazar ben Judah *he-Hasid* of Worms (c. 1165-c. 1230) not only suffered near-fatal injuries himself but endured the slaughter of his wife, son and daughter at the hands of the Crusaders. We are told by Leo Baeck, himself a saving remnant of the latter day *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, that the pious Eleazar never wrote a word of hatred against his persecutors.

4. Ecclesiasticus 28:107, (Revised Standard Version). Compare the biblical Proverbs 20:22; 24:7; 25:11.

On the other hand, the same age produced a jolting and profoundly bitter elegy, *Av ha-Raḥamim* ("Father of Mercies"), with its unsparing plea for divine revenge:

May the merciful Father who dwells on high, in his infinite mercy, remember those saintly, upright and blameless souls, the holy communities who offered their lives for the sanctification of the divine name. They were lovely and amiable in their life, and were not parted in their death. They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions to do the will of their master and the desire of their Stronghold. May our God remember them favorably among the other righteous of the world; may he avenge the blood of his servants which has been shed, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, the man of God: "O nations, make his people joyful! He avenges the blood of his servants, renders retribution to his foes, and provides atonement for his land and his people." And by thy servants, the prophets, it is written: "I will avenge their blood which I have not yet avenged; the Lord dwells in Zion." And in the holy writings it is said: "Why should the nations say, 'Where then is their God?' Let the vengeance for thy servants' blood that is shed be made known among the nations in our sight." And it is further said: "The avenger of bloodshed remembers them; he does not forget the cry of the humble." And it is further said: "He will execute judgment upon the nations and fill [the battle-field] with corpses; he will shatter the [enemy's] head over all the wide earth. From the brook by the wayside he will drink; then he will lift up his head triumphantly."⁵

It should not be too hard to see why religious liberals and a few late traditionalists opted either to excise or to downplay such exceptionable passages in the prayerbook. Their reasoning no doubt ran along these lines. In the years following the Emancipation how would it have looked if we continued to nurse ill feelings towards those who gave us our freedom from the ghetto but whose forebears brutally victimized ours not long before? Would we not be biting the hand that was feeding us? What is more, would not our supposed misanthropy only prove us undeserving of being taken in by gentile society at large? The heirs of the Emancipation thus adopted the tactic of accentuating those aspects of the Jewish tradition that speak of non-violence, forbearance, and *ahavat ha-beriyot* (love of humankind).⁶ By the same token, another major turning point in

5. Nearly one hundred and twenty-five years ago in this country, Benjamin Szold (1829-1902), rabbi and father to Henrietta Szold of Hadassah fame, was the only religious liberal liturgist to keep *Av ha-Raḥamim* in his prayerbook, but only through "May our God remember them for good among the righteous of the world"; the Reformers, the Reconstructionists, and Max D. Klein chose to leave it out entirely; while the mainstream Conservatives have let it stand, with none of the usual detailed rubrics as to when it was to be recited, suggesting the prayer's optionality. But, on short notice, it finds its way back into the Reform High Holy Day prayerbook with an interesting change of venue (*Gates of Repentance* [1978], pages 434-35, in the middle of its Martyrology).

6. To temper the harsh tone of the verses beginning with *ve-yinqom* [= May He exact retribution], the Artscroll *siddur* has the ensuing comment based on what Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote in accord with the *Zeitgeist*: "We do not pray that we be strong enough to avenge our martyrs; Jews are not motivated by a lust to repay violence and murder with violence and

the life of our people, the *Shoah*, was to evoke second thoughts about our former conciliatory attitudes.

But is *neqamah* the alternative that we want to foster? Passivity as a result of powerlessness has been ruled out as not to our taste and out of keeping with values based on self-assertiveness and self-respect. No minority should ever again be compelled to reconcile itself to the unwarranted abuse it has had to take for so long. Yet a part of us admits that there is something self-transcending, inspiring, and invincible in the manner in which Eleazar of Worms and Jewish martyrs of all times refused to flinch in the face of adversity or to return evil for evil in feeling or in act. Can we not, with reservations, call this a high form of civil disobedience, religious nonconformity, or passive resistance?

It can be said too, that *neqamah* stemmed from powerlessness. If there was no available means of redressing indignities our tortured ancestors doubtless consoled themselves in thinking that, in the fullness of time, the "God of vengeance" and of justice would give all the wrongdoers and the wronged their due recompense. The wish for *neqamah* serves as just one type of response to the calamities that befall a helpless people.

When our ancestors prayed that God's wrath be poured on the heads of their foes, we can understand the need to vent their anger before the Divine Hearer of their woes. But if they would, or could, return blow for blow, or go beyond, we must wonder how appropriate such retributive talk is in a liturgical setting. The old estimable principle of the link between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* still holds: what we ought to pray implies what we ought to believe. The prayerbook states the values to which we aspire. Is *neqamah*, then, the kind of religious ideal we want to set before ourselves, act out in our lives and relationships? If so, we are dismissing that prominent strain in the Jewish ethical tradition that forcefully promotes *ahavat ha-beriyot*. Even if unconditional love for all humankind is beyond our reach, certainly we can at least bear in mind and heart the rude awakening experienced by Elisha, the victim-turned-executioner, in Elie Wiesel's *Dawn*.

The spoken or written word, if repeated often enough, leaves an unmistakable imprint on our attitudes. We cannot help internalizing the attitudes and values exalted by the *Siddur*, however frequently or infrequently we may use it or come in contact with it. Do we want our rites to emblazon, "O God of vengeance (*neqamot*), O LORD; O God of vengeance, appear!" (Psalm 94:1, which psalm is traditionally recited every Wednesday) and drown out *olam hesed yibbaneh*, (Ps. 89:3), interpreted by the Rabbis to mean that "the world is built on steadfast love"?

These reflections are in no way intended to extenuate the horrors and losses inflicted on our people or simply to let bygones be bygones. All

murder. Rather we pray that God choose how and when to atone for the blood of his fallen martyrs. For the living, decency and integrity remain the primary goals of social life."

that is urged is that we take due caution and not allow, in word, thought, or deed, vigilantism to replace vigilance, or *neqamah* and other forms of sweeping hatred impair our ethical style and sensitivity despite the hateful things done to us then or now. While *mah yomeru ha-goyim* clearly should not be ignored, it is not necessary for it to form our prime concern. Rather, what we must make doubly sure is that we do not lose our moral and spiritual temper as a *goy qadosh*, a holy people.

Lilith

JAYSETH GUBERMAN

The flower of womanhood.

You are like no flower,
you are a snake.

A cobra
with your head erect,

ready to strike.
And stricken was I.

The apple of my eye.

Out of reach,
bittersweet

like the honey-apple
I've never tasted.

But when in reach
you are still no joy,

for your taste is forbidden,
and cast from the Garden

was I.

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Isaac's Blindness: A Medical Diagnosis

S. LEVIN

BIBLICAL BLINDNESS IS MEDICALLY obscure, although trachoma, an infective disease of the cornea, must have been common; its prevalence in Palestine is noted about 1920.¹ Even the apocryphal Tobit's explanation of his blindness (2:10) is medically unclear. Isaac's blindness, however, is associated with a couple of apparently irrelevant features which are, in fact, highly significant, and which permit consideration of a surprising diagnosis.

In medical terms it is of the utmost importance to establish Isaac's probable age at the time of his blindness and of his death, but precisely in these respects the biblical text is contradictory. On the one hand we read that Isaac grew blind and gave parting blessings to his sons, sensing that he might die, and on the other we read that he survived for decades thereafter, to be buried by Esau and Jacob after the time when they became reconciled, some decades after Jacob's sojourn in Haran. According to the text (Genesis 35:28) Isaac died at the age of one hundred and eighty. The two accounts are irreconcilable. The second may be dismissed as a tendentious afterthought, for the following reasons:

1. The biblical editor who interposed verses 27-79 of chapter 35 did so presumably because he wanted to honour Jacob as having buried his father, it hardly being acceptable that Esau did so on his own. But a later account, with Jacob now on his death bed, denies that he buried his parents, for he states, "I am to be gathered to my people: bury me with my forefathers in the cave . . . of Machpelah . . . There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah" (Genesis 49:29-31). Clearly this contradicts the two verses granting Jacob the honour of participating in the burial of his father. Verse 35:26, dealing with Jacob's offspring, is meant to lead — uninterrupted — to verse 36:1 dealing with Esau's offspring.

2. When Jacob returned from Haran he did not make straight for Hebron or Beersheba, as we would expect if he knew that his parents were still alive. Instead, he tarried at Succot, Bethel, Shechem and Efrat. Nor, on meeting Esau, did he ask, as did Joseph, "Does my father still live?" (42:13, 45:3). Jacob had heard of the death of his parents and of

1. E.W.G. Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine in Modern and Biblical Times* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, c. 1920), pp. 20-22.

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their burial by Esau, when he was still in Haran, and dared not travel south to their funerals lest Esau make good an earlier threat to kill him.

3. It is inconceivable that a prematurely aged, blind invalid, near to death, could survive another fifty or sixty years, and, if he did, the text supplies not a single word about his doings during this period.

Much more acceptable is the first version dealing with the time of his gathering blindness as a prelude to his death. Isaac wondered whether he was shortly to die (27:2), an opinion confirmed by Esau (27:41). Rebekah had the same fear and that is why she sent Jacob to Haran, to be out of harm's way when Isaac died and Esau was free to wreak vengeance on the twin who had stolen his birthright and his legitimate blessing (27:41, 42).

And so Isaac died days, weeks or perhaps some months after he gave his final blessing. How old was he at the time? The text states that Isaac married at the age of forty (25:20) and that twenty years later (25:26) became a father. Esau also married at forty (26:34), so that Isaac was somewhat over one hundred years old when he made ready to die.

A hundred years? Surely not. In relation to the tales of longevity among the patriarchs and through to the period of Joshua, I accept the explanation of Rosenzweig² that, during this period, years were counted in dual numbers, a summer year followed by a winter year, so that all ages are doubled.³ Accordingly, Isaac died shortly after he lost his sight at the age of somewhat more than fifty years. This now sounds medically reasonable. A prematurely aged man, blind at fifty, and with a foreboding of impending death, confirmed by outside observers, is likely to have had the sugar sickness, diabetes mellitus, and ocular cataracts, which are very common in diabetes, as is also diabetic disease of the retina.

What caused the presentiment of death? The first three verses of chapter 27 mention his premature aging, his blindness and his uncertainty about when he would die. But verse 4 ("before I die", echoed by Rebekah in vv. 7, 10) has a more immediate quality. Evidently something took place — more than the longstanding blindness — which made Isaac want to give parting blessings to his sons. One could postulate that another diabetic complication rendered him helpless and bedridden, for when Jacob arrived with food he addressed his father, "Rise, sit up . . ." (Genesis 27:19). Why should a fifty year old man be lying down in the morning? Among the common complications of diabetes are major or minor cerebral vascular strokes, leaving the victim weakened in one or

2. H. Rosenzweig, "Life History Data in the Bible from Abraham to Joshua," *JUDAISM*, 29 (1980): 353.

3. Moses confronted Pharaoh at a vigorous forty and not tired eighty years; Sarah was pregnant at an unremarkable forty-five years; Ishmael was circumcised at thirteen seasons while Isaac, at his near sacrifice, was, indeed, a 'naar', a lad, not in his mid-thirties but in his teens. Rosenzweig's theory is not water-tight: it can't explain the time periods for Jacob's offspring, nor that of the Levite priestly service in the tabernacle, 25-50 years (Numbers 8:24, 25), which are surely annual years, not biannual seasons. Nevertheless, these exceptions do not detract from the overall value of his theory.

more limbs, even paralyzed and immobilized. This could still be present despite Isaac's hearty appetite for venison and the fact that he was mentally clear and articulate until at least the time when Jacob fled to Haran. Nevertheless, if, indeed, something happened to convince him that death was approaching, it is likely to have been some cerebral vascular complication resulting in leg weakness so that he had to be asked to sit up to eat.

Other biblical figures also had dimming of sight: Jacob (Genesis 48:10, with a premonition of death), Eli (1 Samuel 3:2, with the same root word, *keheh*, used as in the case of Isaac) and Ahijah (1 Kings 14:4). Of Moses, in contrast, it was written that he was not *keheh*, dim-sighted, and not impotent (Deuteronomy 34:7).

Were Jacob, Eli and Ahijah diabetics? No, they did not have the particular problem of Isaac: impotence! About a third of middle-aged diabetics are impotent, at least much of the time, and impotence can be the presenting symptom of diabetes. Once we can entertain this possibility we can then interpret a number of related narratives in a different light.

Why did Isaac favor Esau? Because he was a hunter and brought venison? No; because Isaac envied the virility which he himself lacked. He saw in Esau that which he missed so much in himself. Esau satisfied several wives (Genesis 26:34, 28:8, 9, 36:2, 3). Jacob, too, satisfied several wives, but that was years later. At a time when Esau was already much married, Isaac observed that Jacob had not agitated for a wife.

Isaac had one wife and no concubines. Moreover, Rebekah became pregnant only once, and that after she had been married for perhaps ten years. Sarah and Rachel also conceived with difficulty, but their husbands were undoubtedly fertile. Was it Rebekah who was relatively infertile (25:21) or was the problem with Isaac?

If Isaac failed to give early offspring to Rebekah and, moreover, if he failed to satisfy her sexual needs, one might have expected her to have voiced some frustration, however disguised the context. This, too, is in evidence: *Kazti behayai* . . . she says . . . I am fed up with my life (27:46). It is made very plain that this sentiment is in relation to her son Esau marrying a couple of local Hittite women (26:34, 35, 36:2, 3). Presumably, an in-marrying with the daughters of his uncle Ishmael was preferred (28:8, 9). On the other hand, perhaps Rebekah's objections related more to comparing her frustrated self with the well-satisfied wives of Esau.

Rebekah's role in the deception of both the inadequate Isaac and the virile Esau lends another dimension — frustration, envy, bitterness — to her role in her primary aim, that of demeaning both Isaac and his favourite Esau in the matter of Isaac's parting blessing, so that Jacob benefits.

It is a daring exegesis but the symptoms do add up, do make clinical sense, and do suggest that Isaac was a diabetic and had diabetic cataracts or retinal disease. For a modern reader seeking a rational explanation, a good answer is that Isaac became gradually blind from diabetic retinitis or increasingly dense cataracts and died from the other complications, probably cerebro-vascular, of diabetes mellitus.

The Rabbinic Ban on Conversion in Argentina

MOSHE ZEMER

WHAT CONSTITUTES A VALID CONVERSION?

This question has become the focus of one of the most controversial issues in Jewish life and the wide divergence of opinion, even among the religious movements about the meaning of “converted to Judaism” in the Israeli Law of Return, is but one part of the problem. A less known aspect is the total opposition of certain Orthodox circles to conversions, including those considered halakhically valid by most Orthodox decisors. This extremist position has greatly influenced the views of more moderate traditionalists.

This paper will explore a radically negative approach to proselytes in the form of a rabbinic ban against conversion which was promulgated in Argentina some sixty years ago. This *takkanah*, which prohibited even halakhic conversions, was to last “until the end of time” and, to a certain extent, is still in effect today.

In 1927, Rabbi Shaul David Setton of the Syrian Jewish community of Buenos Aires, supported by two rabbinic colleagues, made the following proclamation prohibiting conversions in the Argentine:¹

There is still another reason to forbid conversions even if they were executed properly (“according to the *din*,” i.e. halakhah) because life in this city is exceedingly wanton, and everybody does as he pleases; there is no rabbi serving the Jewish community, whose authority is respected by the government or by any other party. Hence, anyone who wishes, takes an unconverted gentile woman for his wife or chooses lay persons at random (to serve as witnesses) and “converts” her in their presence. They now have children who are disqualified, though their Jewish father claims that they had them converted. If anyone asks them: in whose presence did this conversion take place? they respond impudently: who set you up (to judge us) and why are you meddling? He remains with his gentile wife, with whom he fathers children that have the same status as their mother, to be absorbed by the gentiles.

Therefore I dispersed announcements that it is forbidden to accept converts in Argentina until the end of time, (*ad kol yemei olam*) for several reasons which we three rabbis endorse. This must not be transgressed, for any-

1. Shaul David Setton, *Responsa Dibber Shaul, Yore Deah*, no. 3, (Jerusalem: 1928). The co-sponsors of the ban are Aharon Goldman and Yosef Yedid, the chief rabbi of the Aleppo community in Jerusalem.

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one that breaks a fence will be bitten by a snake.² Whoever wishes to be converted should travel to Jerusalem and perchance will be accepted there by the rabbinic court.

... This is the opinion of the shepherd of the holy flock in the magnificent city Bueno Aires:

The young one SHAUL DAVID SETTON, S.T.³

Before determining what motivated the pronouncement of the decree, we must first identify the person or persons responsible for initiating and inspiring it. *Prima facie*, the answer is quite simple, since the ban was first published in the book of responsa written by Rabbi Setton and the few scholars who have mentioned it have all credited it to him.⁴

A clue to the responsible party may be found in Setton's introduction to the ban which states: "There is still another reason to forbid conversions . . ." If there is "still another reason" we must assume that there was a first one. Immediately before stating the ban Setton quotes in full a long responsum by Rabbi Aharon Halevi Goldman which gives the halakhic and ideological basis of the decree against conversion.⁵ The key to the ban may be found, therefore, in the interaction of these rabbinic foils, Setton and Goldman.

Rabbinic Foils

Shaul David Setton was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1851, the descendant of a well-known rabbinic family. In the introduction to his book of responsa, *Dibber Shaul*, he states that he was educated at the feet of great Torah scholars in Aram Zohah (Aleppo) and that he, in turn, raised up some of the greatest scholars who served on rabbinical courts in Syria and Jerusalem. In 1912, he migrated to Argentina to serve his Aleppine compatriots and found the condition of the Jews of Buenos Aires at a low ebb. He testifies that he worked hard to improve the quality of Jewish life in the city by regulating ritual slaughter and kashrut. This achievement, in

2. This is a Talmudic reference to the snake of the sages that fatally stings anyone disobeying their dicta. See *Shabbat* 110a, based on Ecclesiastes 10:8 and Rashi, *Avodah Zarah* 27b. Undoubtedly this word is used as a double entendre, since *nahash* is an acronym for *niddui*, *herem* and *shmita*, three forms of interdiction.

3. *Sefardi tavor*, "a pure Sephardic Jew," is an expression customarily used by those who trace their ancestry directly to Jews who were expelled from Spain in the 15th century.

4. Moshe Davis, "Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, X, no. 2 (Dec., 1968): 189-191, 217-220; Shalom Rosenberg, "Argentina," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: 1972), vol. 3, column 421; and Victor A. Mirelman, *The Jews in Argentina*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University (New York: 1973) among others. As far as can be determined, no one of the above authors, nor anyone else, has yet analyzed this ban in depth.

5. Setton, *Op. cit.*, no. 2, which is identical with Aharon Halevi Goldman, *Responsa Divrei Aharon, Yoreh Deah* no. 40 (Jerusalem: 1981). It is significant to note that Setton also printed a *teshuvah* by Goldman immediately after the ban (Setton, *Ibid.* no. 4 = Goldman, *Ibid.*, no. 42). It was not mere chance that Setton literally surrounded the ban with Goldman responsa on conversion.

addition to the halakhic benefit, produced great monetary profit for the community, enabling the purchase of three plots of land to build a synagogue and two schools. He also established a *hevrah kadisha*. He does not list any scholarly achievements nor does he mention the ban as one of his accomplishments.⁶

Aharon Halevi Goldman, the founder and spiritual leader of the Jewish colony, Moisesville (Kiryat Moshe), located 600 kilometres north of Buenos Aires in the province of Santa Fe, was born in Podolia, Russia, in 1854. An exceptional Talmudic scholar, he was ordained at the age of eighteen, but preferred to make his living as a *shohet*. In 1889, he emigrated to Moisesville as the rabbi and leader of some 120 East European families there. Although he was the absolute religious authority of this uprooted *shtetel* in Latin America, it was undoubtedly very difficult to be separated from the Eastern European cradle of Torah and Talmud. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he carried on an intensive halakhic correspondence with many of the great rabbinic scholars of the day, including Isaac Elchanan Spector of Kovno, Samuel Salant, Israel Meir Hacoheh of Radin (the "Hafetz Hayim"), Abraham Isaac Hacoheh Kook and Naftali Adler of London, among others. This learned exchange is recorded in his *Responso Divrei Aharon*.⁷

As noted, Setton adopted Goldman's responsum as the halakhic basis of the ban: "I sent my halakhic decision (on conversion) to Rabbi Aharon Halevi Goldman, but kept no copy for myself; my opinion, however, is covered by his responsum to me." The Rabbi of Moisesville replied:

"I was startled at hearing and alarmed at seeing" (Isaiah 21:3) the news of the state of affairs in the land, that there are men who have thrown off the yoke of Heaven. They have taken gentile wives and have begotten children. Then, to cover up their wantonness, they wish to have their alien wives and foreign children accepted as converts to, and included in, the Congregation of Israel.⁸

Goldman then quotes a number of halakhic sources to prove why such conversion is unacceptable, including a reference to Moses Isserles, who said that "the iniquity (of mixed marriage) is more severe than all the forbidden degrees of incest."⁹ He then proceeds to reason:

From these halakhic references it is apparent to all that by their trespasses these lustful sinners have revoltingly removed themselves from the Community of Israel, as if they had become wedded to idolatry . . . Who would be such a fool as to be taken in by their declaration that they sincerely wish to convert their alien wives and foreign children, since all their trickery and deceit are nothing but an attempt to whitewash their irresponsibility, in order to obtain religious sanction . . .

6. Setton, *Op. cit.*, in the introduction entitled: "A softly spoken introduction by the author" (no page number).

7. Goldman, *Op. cit.*, no. 2.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Shulhan Arukh, Even Haezer* 16:1.

Rabbi Goldman presents another halakhic argument against accepting proselytes, based on the ruling that "a prospective female convert must be investigated lest she has set her eye on young Jewish men."¹⁰ This is one of the ulterior motives which, at the outset, may disqualify the candidate for conversion.

Goldman makes the following application of this halakhah to the typical mixed couple in Argentina:

It is most evident that the conflagration of lust burns in them and that lechery is the counsel of sinners, so that now she expresses her willingness to enter the Jewish religion. However, when the flame of passion cools off, or for some other reason, she slides back, because in every cause and effect relationship, when the cause is eliminated the effect disappears. Is it possible that her libertine lover who embraces this alien woman would say to her: "Forget your people and your father's home"? No, it is clear as the sun that he, too, will follow her as an ox is led to the slaughter. This will be an eternal shame and dreadful disgrace. Now, where is her conversion?!

Goldman does not mention the rulings of the codes or of the many respondents that an ulterior motive for conversion, such as marriage with a Jew, may disqualifying the candidate at the outset (*lekhatilah*), but, nevertheless, *ex post facto* (*bediavad*), the conversion may be valid.¹¹ The above are but a sample of the innumerable arguments negating the possibility of conversion in the Argentine which Goldman puts forward in his responsum to Setton.

What are the roots of the halakhic co-operation of these two rabbis which resulted in this ban? Do we find symmetry in their absolute opposition to conversion? The collected responsa of Goldman, which contains an exchange of fifteen letters with Setton, including six that deal with conversion, has recently become available¹² and provides us with a basis for evaluating the relationship between the two rabbinic leaders, especially with regard to accepting proselytes.

Converting an Arab in Buenos Aires

In 1915, about twelve years before the proclamation of the ban, Setton wrote a *she'elah* to Goldman, on behalf of a *beit din* in Buenos Aires requesting his help in the conversion of a Syrian Arab.

10. *Shulhan Arukh, Yore Deah*, 268:12 based on Maimonides, *Yad*, Laws of Forbidden Relations, 13:14.

11. See *Yad*, Laws of Forbidden Relations, 13:17; *Responsa Shlomo ben Shimshon* (HaRashbash), (Livorno: 1742), no. 368; Shlomo Kluger, *Responsa Tuv Ta'am Va'Da-at* (Lemberg: 1903), vol. I, no. 130; Eliezer Deutsch, *Responsa Pri Hasadeh* (Pecs: 1909), II, no. 3; David Zvi Hoffmann, *Responsa Melammed Leho-il* (Frankfort: 1928), *Y.D.* 83 and others. See also David Ellenson, "The Development of Orthodox Attitudes to Conversion in the Modern Period," *Conservative Judaism*, 36, no. 4 (1983): 57-53.

12. Goldman, *Op. cit.*, *Y.D.* numbers 35-38, 41-42 on matters of conversion; *Orakh Haim* numbers 7-9, 11-13, 15; and *Even Haezer* 72-73 on other issues. There is a similar responsum on conversion, *Y.D.* no. 39, addressed to Rabbi Moshe David Setton, a relative of Shaul Setton, and his successor.

An uncircumcised one, named Salim Ben Avraham, came before us. He is more or less 27 years old, and comes from a village near our city, Aleppo. He speaks Arabic and wants to be converted to Judaism. We, who are a rabbinical court worthy of judging him, have investigated and found that he has no ulterior motive whatsoever. Therefore we have sent him to your honor to check him further and, if you will agree with us to accept him as a convert, we request that you arrange for his circumcision and immersion.¹³

Setton warmly recommended this prospective convert, whose motivation was for the sake of heaven. He did not, however, enter into halakhic negotiation as do many questioners. ("The question of a sage is half an answer.") Setton asked Goldman to confirm the positive verdict of his rabbinical court, he anticipated that his colleague would recognize the importance of this conversion and would fulfill this request: "Our hopes are great that you will promptly do everything and even more . . . for it is known how great is the *mizvah* (of conversion) and its reward."

In his responsum,¹⁴ Goldman indicates that he fully understands the expectations of his colleagues: "They have sought me so they might hear my agreement." Yet, he could not accommodate them: "I am not content with this matter nor do I concur," and states an halakhic objection which appears throughout his responsa as a leitmotif. It is impossible to accept proselytes in Argentina when, according to the *Shulhan Arukh*,¹⁵ one must inform the prospective convert in advance of some aspects of the punishment for the violation of commandments such as desecrating the Sabbath and eating forbidden foods.

To my consternation, and that of every upright person, the scourge has spread here, for many of our brethren have abandoned the Torah, so that stringent *mizvot* like the desecration of the Sabbath have become the lightest of the light. These violators so outnumber us, that if one should find a Jew who keeps the Shabbat and the like, he would be considered on a level with a *zaddik*. There are so few that a child could make a list.

Now imagine, if we warn the convert concerning all the above (*mizvot*) and, afterwards, when he sees with his own eyes how many of our brothers trespass everything with contempt, then he will surely ask: what was all this that the Rabbis of Israel warned us. Is not the House of Israel just like all the gentiles? Are we not, then, responsible when, God forbid, he vilifies all of the disciplines of Judaism, and he, too, is added to our enemies to "be as pricks in our eyes and thorns in our sides"¹⁶ . . . [T]herefore I will have nothing to do with this case.

In spite of his objections, however, Goldman would not coerce the members of the rabbinical court to accept his position: "In a matter like this, the *dayan* must judge according to what his eyes see and his knowledge of the quality and deliberation of the person, whether to push him

13. Goldman, *Op. cit.*, Y.D. no. 35.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Yore Deah* 268:2, *Sifte Cohen* paragraph 3, based on *Yebamot* 47a.

16. Based on Numbers 33:55.

away or draw him near.”¹⁷ This exchange is complemented by a series of responsa in which Setton anxiously tried to convince Goldman to accept the lenient approach to conversion for the sake of marriage, as espoused by the rabbi of Cairo, Rafael Aharon ibn Shimon, but to no avail.¹⁸ To the consternation of his Syrian colleague, Goldman turned the tables on him by claiming that ibn Shimon’s position on conversion was not at all lenient, but stringent, in accordance with the strictest requirements of the halakhah. This he did by virtuoso interpretation, relying more on eisegesis than on exegesis. Goldman contended that a lenient approach to conversion could not possibly be applicable to the wanton life of the Jews of Argentina. Even if it were possible to prove that this approach was valid in No Amon, how could one compare Egypt with the Shechem of Argentina?!

The Lenient, the Stringent and the Absolute

The above rabbinic interchange reveals the following factors essential to understanding the promulgation of the *takkanah*:

1) *The relationship between the two rabbis*: In this extensive halakhic correspondence, the rabbi from Buenos Aires was always the *shoel* (questioner) who appealed to the authority of the respondent from the Santa Fe province. Setton’s rabbinical court in the capital city would not make a final decision to convert the Arab until they had sent him to the rabbi of the small agricultural colony for investigation and acceptance. The questioner did not engage in the halakhic negotiation customary among rabbis of similar stature. Goldman, on the other hand, responded with decisiveness and absolute authority. Even when Setton found strong halakhic support for his position on conversion for the sake of marriage, he yielded to Goldman’s superior legalistic reasoning and stronger personality. In general, Setton demonstrates almost complete dependence on Goldman in matters of halakhah.

2) *Contrasting views of conversion*: At the beginning of the exchange on the subject, more than a decade before the ban, Setton took a relatively lenient stand. His unsophisticated approach to conversion was limited by the bounds of the applicable halakhah which simply requires circumcision or ritual blood letting (*hatafat dam habrit*), immersion and acceptance of the yoke of the commandments. In his view, there should have been no problem when a qualified rabbinical court investigated an Arab candidate and found his desire to convert in accordance with the dictates of Jewish Law. He presented as evidence the legal opinion of a leading Egyptian rabbi to support leniency in accepting converts for marriage.

17. *Tosephot, Yevamot* 24b and 109b.

18. *Nahar Mizraim (No Amon: 1908)*, Y.D. *Hilkhot Gerim*, pp. 111-115; quoted in Goldman, *Op. cit.*, nos. 36-38.

The halakhah permits conversion as long as one stays within its guidelines.

On the other hand, Goldman held an absolutist view. Fulfilling the requirements of the accepted codes is not sufficient for a valid conversion. Goldman went far beyond the rabbinic norms by insisting that no converts be accepted unless they lived in a Jewish environment with universal observance of the *mizvot*.¹⁹ Of course, such conditions were non-existent in the cities of Argentina. Furthermore, an expert rabbinical court (*beit din mumheh*) would have had to examine the candidate.²⁰ Goldman well knew that such a court, with the expertise to qualify according to the halakhic criteria, was not to be found in the land. Furthermore, a precondition for accepting proselytes seemed to require that the rabbis fight and protest against those who underwent invalid conversions and were received into the Jewish community. Alas, this condition could not be filled as Goldman himself lamented: "We have not the power to protest because we have no eminent rabbinic court (*beit din yafeh*)."²¹

One of the characteristics of an absolutist is to insist on requirements, prerequisites and conditions that are impossible to fulfill. Even the most fitting candidate could not be converted because there was no completely observant Jewish community in which he could live, nor was there an expert or eminent rabbinic court. Since conversion is permitted in the Talmud, the codes and the responsa literature, Goldman could not do away with it by fiat. However, by mounting highly original halakhic obstacles, he effectively eliminated the possibility of conversion for those who accepted his authority.

Interestingly, Goldman seems to ignore the credentials of the religious authority which officiated at conversions. It didn't seem to matter whether the officiant was a bona fide rabbinic court like that of Setton or one that was irregular and unqualified. In any event, conversion was impossible unless accepted by a non-existent *beit din mumheh*. His axiomatic and unyielding opposition to proselytism was based not only on halakhic principles but on his *weltanschauung* and, particularly, his view of Jewish life in the Latin American diaspora. He was convinced that the demand for conversion was the inevitable result of the evil of mixed marriage. In his view, the Jewish husbands of gentile women were wanton sinners who had removed themselves from *kelal Yisrael*. Furthermore, no distinction could be made between the marriage of a born Jew with a convert to Judaism, on the one hand, and that of a Jew with an unconverted

19. Goldman, *Op. cit.*, no. 35.

20. *Ibid.*, no. 40.

21. *Ibid.*, no. 37. This *beit din yafeh* is the outstanding court in wisdom and number of the entire generation, according to *Sefer Mizvot Hagadol*, positive commandment no. 307. *Sanhedrin* 32b brings a *baraita* that we should follow an eminent court like that of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanus or Raban Yohanan ben Zakai. Obviously, such a court was not to be found in Argentina.

gentile, on the other. The conversion of a gentile to Judaism was an empty act which could not be considered valid, even *post factum*.

By contrast, Setton originally held the view that conversion in Argentina was not only permissible but might even be considered a *mizvah*. He felt that his position was strictly within the borders of the *halakhah* and he certainly would not have accepted the appellation "lenient." But he soon discovered that meeting all of the prerequisites of Jewish law would not gain Goldman's approval. Moreover, he was shocked to find his affirmative approach cut to pieces by Goldman's casuistry. During the first round of their correspondence, beginning more than a decade before the ban, the rabbi of Buenos Aires desperately tried to contend with the rabbi of Moisesville and convince him that the *halakhah* was, indeed, on his side.

Finally, after more than a decade of instructions, cajoling and exhorting, Goldman convinced Setton to accept his view that it was forbidden, under any circumstances, to accept converts in Argentina. Setton gradually abandoned his relatively liberal position on conversion based on the plain meaning of the rabbinic codes. In this period he made a turn-about of 180 degrees and came to identify completely with Goldman's absolutism. Since he could neither dispute Goldman's superior knowledge of Torah nor match his stronger personality and self confidence, he joined him, and with fervor. Like many a new convert, Setton went about executing his teacher's ideas, putting them into action and applying them to the realities of the Argentine Jewish community.

The adoption of this position came in the wake of a long relationship of halakhic and ideological dependence in which the rabbi from Aleppo found himself relying more and more on the rabbi from Podolia. The dynamics of this relationship enable us to understand how the ban on conversion came to fruition as an obstacle to mixed marriage.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Setton must be given credit that once he was convinced of the need for a *gezerah* against conversion, it was he who published and distributed the ban and obtained the *haskamot* (imprimaturs) of the Chief Rabbis of Palestine. He acted in his typically industrious manner, making every effort to get it accepted. Yet the brains behind the ban, the prime mover and initiator was, without a doubt, Rabbi Aharon Goldman, whose stringent view on conversion was finally accepted not only by Setton but became the declared policy of Argentine Jewry. Thus, we have witnessed how an extreme position held by a single individual, enhanced by great halakhic knowledge, determination and persuasive skills, eventually became eminent domain.

The White Slavery Connection

Of course, the halakhic stances and the character of these rabbis were not the only factors that led to the ban. Many historical and sociological circumstances contributed to its pronouncement. A thorough investiga-

tion of these complex phenomena is beyond the scope of this paper, but we shall look into a popular belief, held by a number of Argentinian Jews, that the ban on conversion was pronounced in reaction to the Jewish white slave traffic in the country.

As far as I have been able to determine, no empirical evidence has been submitted to support this theory. The organized Jewish community did, indeed, impose a comprehensive social ban on these "impure" white slave traders who, in turn, established their own separate synagogue, cemetery and mutual aid society known as Zvi Migdal. However, nowhere is this communal ostracism reflected in the ban and the rabbinic respondents did not refer to this moral aberration as a reason for promulgating the decree against conversion. There is no doubt that Goldman, Setton and other rabbinic leaders would have remonstrated against the influence of Jewish prostitution on outmarriages and improper conversions if they had been convinced of this relationship.

This theory might have been dismissed as mere folk legend if its "proof" had not been furnished by a professor of American history. Robert Weisbrot, in his comprehensive history of the Jews of Argentina, gives the following explanation of the ban on conversion:

This stricture was intended to bolster the community in its struggle against the white slave trade, because many Argentine males sought to appease their kidnapped wives — usually Jewish women sold by the slavers — by converting to Judaism. Naturally their conversion was insincere, their marital status worse than dubious and the whole process of conversion a disgrace upon the Jewish community.²²

Unfortunately, Weisbrot does not buttress this fascinating hypothesis with any contemporary documents. His only source is an interview that he held with an Argentine newspaperman forty-five years after the event and without any supporting evidence.²³ What is the historical basis, if any, for the claim that a large number of gentile men in the white slave trade sought out the rabbinic courts so that they could convert to Judaism for the sake of their Jewish prostitute wives? All rabbinic sources that relate to this ban and to mixed marriages refer exclusively to the conversion of the non-Jewish wife and make no mention of the gentile husband. Furthermore, in-depth scientific studies of Jewish white slavery by Edward J. Bristow and Lloyd Gartner have failed to reveal the slightest relationship between this phenomenon and the problem of conversion in the Argentine.²⁴ We must therefore conclude that there is none and, until such evi-

22. Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina from the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1979), pp. 162-163.

23. The author documents his source: "Interview with Nissim Einacave 17 July, 1972," *Ibid.*, footnote number 13.

24. Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Lloyd Gartner, "Anglo-Jewry and Traffic in Prostitution," *AJS Review*, vol. 7-8 (1982-83): 129 ff. Both sources deal with the sociological and religious ramifications of this universal problem in its Argentine permutation.

dence is produced, we may put to rest the myth that the Jewish white slave trade in the Argentine was the cause of the ban on conversion.

The Efficacy of the Ban

What was the efficacy of the ban? Did it achieve the proclaimed goal of preventing all conversions in Argentina for all time? Did it effectively reduce the rate of mixed marriages in the country? According to one scholar, Moshe Davis,

the ban on conversion and the activities of the Jewish community officially helped to remove the problem of mixed marriage from the public agenda . . . The mixed marriage problem, although it did not disappear, was significantly diminished in importance . . .²⁵

There is, however, no objective confirmation of this optimistic evaluation. In general, it is difficult to verify such statements since no accurate statistics are available on mixed marriages and conversions.²⁶ We do, though, have evidence from other sources indicating that the ban was, to a great extent, opposed or ignored. Certainly there is no proof that it was universally accepted or that the problem of mixed marriages was virtually solved. The Chief Rabbi of Aleppo, Hizkiya Shabtai, related that he was in Argentina in 1927 and again in 1929 and found that "certain self-proclaimed sages rose up, broke a fence and converted on their own authority" in defiance of the ban.²⁷

The issue continued to be very much alive. A heated and erudite debate took place among the foremost scholars in Jerusalem — Chief Rabbis Uziel and Kook with Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank — on the Jewish status of those converted by Orthodox rabbis in Argentina in spite of the ban.²⁸ There are sources which indicate that conversions in defiance of the ban were becoming increasingly more frequent.

When attempts were made to rescind the prohibition, supporters of the ban appealed to Jerusalem for help. In 1938, a pamphlet was published in Buenos Aires with the endorsements of the Chief Rabbinate of Palestine, the High Rabbinic Courts of the Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Aleppo Communities in Jerusalem, and the Rabbis and Rabbinic Courts of Aleppo.²⁹ The fear that the ban might be overturned seems to have

25. Moshe Davis, *Beit Yisrael Be-America* (Hebrew) (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951), p. 304. Compare his article, "Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry: Historical Background to Jewish Response," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, X, no. 2 (Dec., 1968): 191.

26. See E. Schmeltz and S. De la Pergola, *The Demography of the Jews of Argentina and other Latin American Countries* (Hebrew) (1974), pp. 33-34. They succeeded in obtaining only a rough estimate of out-marriages, even for a date as late as 1960.

27. Hizkiya Shabtai, *Responsa Divrei Hizkiya*, vol. 2, Y.D., no. 1.

28. Ben Zion Uziel, *Responsa Mishpatei Uziel, Even Ha-ezer*, no. 12; Avraham Kook, *Responsa Daat Cohen*, no. 154; Zvi Pesach Frank, *Responsa Har Zvi*, Laws of Conversion, no. 216.

29. *Endorsements of the Presidents of the Chief Rabbinate of Palestine* [sub-titled]: To establish and strengthen the Ban of Rabbi Shaul Setton prohibiting the acceptance of converts in Argentina, as put forth in his book, *Dibber Shaul* (Hebrew) (Buenos Aires, 1938).

been the motivation for mustering such powerful rabbinic ammunition from the Holy Land and Syria.

There are no official records of the Orthodox conversions that took place in the face of the ban, so it is extremely difficult to estimate their relative or absolute number. Israeli officials have been shown certificates from many an Argentine Orthodox rabbi who declares, together with the other members of his *beit din*, that such a person was converted according to the strict requirements of Jewish law. Nevertheless, these conversions have usually been rejected by the Israel Chief Rabbinate.³⁰ Although the ban continued to be in effect halakhically and officially, there seems to have been neither way nor will to enforce it on those who disobeyed. Non-establishment rabbis and mixed couples continued to circumvent its prohibitions.

Finally, the official rabbinate took a different tack. In 1966, Rabbi David Kahana, formerly Israeli Air Force chief chaplain, became *av beit din* of the rabbinate of the Buenos Aires central *kehillah* known as AMIA (Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina). Shortly afterward, an attempt was made to find a new solution which would observe the decree and yet permit halakhic conversions in Argentina.

Kahana corresponded with one of the great halakhists and rabbinic jurists, Rabbi Joshua Menachem Ehrenberg of Tel Aviv, who found a highly unusual resolution of the problem. We have noted above that the original decree promulgated by Setton and Goldman, while strictly forbidding conversions in Argentina, nevertheless stated that, "Whoever wishes to be converted should travel to Jerusalem and perchance will be accepted there by the rabbinic court." Ehrenberg noted that, earlier, Hizkiya Shabtai of Aleppo had interpreted this condition to mean that it was not necessary for the Argentine court to insist that a prospective convert undertake a journey to Jerusalem. The Rabbinic High Court in the Holy City could send special emissaries to Buenos Aires who, with their permission and, in their name, would officiate at the conversion.³¹ It seems unlikely that this plan was ever carried out.

Ehrenberg widened this opening and found the following solution:

Therefore, in this matter of converts, one must write to the High Rabbinic Court in Jerusalem and if they agree to accept them (the converts), they may appoint your honor (Kahana) and his rabbinic court to be their agents to convert them and in this way we will have fulfilled the requirements of the decree in its entirety.³²

In this way, the convert need not travel to Jerusalem, nor need special

30. I have in my possession such a certificate issued by Gran Rabino J.M. Fischman and two untitled colleagues to a 23-year old woman in Buenos Aires on October 25, 1956. The official Israeli rabbinate refused to officiate at the marriage of this convert's daughter in 1984.

31. Shabtai, *Op. cit.*

32. Yehoshua Menahem Ehrenberg, *Responsa Dibber Yehoshua* (Tel Aviv, 1976), no. 42 (Responsum addressed to David Kahana, May 8, 1969).

envoys come from the Holy Land, because everything could be settled via the mails. Indeed, this became the practice. Rabbi Kahana received written permission from the Israel Chief Rabbi Isser Yehudah Unterman appointing him and his court in Buenos Aires as agents to the High Rabbinic Court of Israel. Several of those converted in this manner went on *aliyah* and were accepted as Jews by the Israel religious establishment, in contrast with those who were converted “in defiance of the ban.”³³

What prompted this step so many years after the proclamation of the ban? It may have been the competition of the non-establishment Orthodox rabbis who continued to accept converts. Another factor was the rivalry of the emergent non-Orthodox movements, represented by the founding of Conservative and Liberal congregations in Buenos Aires in the early 1960s. The Beit Din of the Conservative Seminario Rabinico, under the leadership of its founder, Rabbi Marshall Meyer, built its own *mikveh* and converted hundreds of gentiles a year.³⁴ The lay leaders within the official Orthodox community seem to have applied pressure on the rabbinic establishment to find a solution to the problem of mixed marriage in its ranks.

Whatever may have been its motivation, this rabbinic act enabled the ban to stand in principle, while emptying it of its declared intent — the absolute and eternal prohibition of conversion in Argentina. Through an halakhically approved legal fiction, one might now accept converts without putting aside the ban which prohibits conversions in Argentina “until the end of time.”

Thus the circle was brought to a close. The strictly forbidden became permitted. The absolute ban on accepting converts was officially circumvented. The only alternative that Setton had left to the prospective convert was to go to Jerusalem. Now, instead of sending the candidate off on a journey, a letter was posted to the Holy City, whence came permission to convert on Argentinian soil, this side of eternity.

When Rabbi Kahana left the country a decade ago, his successor as the religious head of AMIA, Rabbi Shlomo Ben-Hamo, reverted to the previous refusal to accept any converts. However, rabbis associated with Agudat Yisrael and other groups have solved the problem in a different fashion: the ad hoc rabbinic court formed for this purpose leaves Buenos Aires with the candidate for conversion and crosses the Rio de la Plata to Colonia, Uruguay. There the convert takes a ritual bath in the river and sails back across the waterway as a new Jew. By means of this legal fiction — a short trip over the border to Uruguay — these rabbis demonstrate that they do not accept converts on Argentinian soil.³⁵ It would appear

33. Interview with Rabbi David Kahanah, August 12, 1984, in Tel Aviv.

34. Based on an interview with Rabbi Shmuel Avidor Hachohen, formerly director of the rabbinic department of the Seminario Rabinico, which took place in Tel Aviv on December 9, 1986.

35. Ibid.

that we have here a reincarnation of the sexagenarian ban in a different form.

Life is stronger than rabbinic prohibition. The alarmingly high rate of mixed marriage and assimilation forces every Jewish society to use the weapons at its disposal to fight these corrosive forces and most Jewish communities, seeing that they cannot prevent outmarriage in an open society, are convinced that conversion must be a viable alternative. The ban promulgated by Setton and Goldman could not prevent conversions although it was approved and supported by great rabbinic scholars throughout the world. During these six decades, certain rabbinic leaders believed that the decree retained its prohibitive force, but they allowed only its letter to stand. The ban was honored mainly in its circumvention.

We have witnessed here an illustration of the developmental character of the halakhah adapting to changing reality. The history of this ban on conversion gives further proof of accommodation within the halakhah, which has developed and progressed throughout the ages in a continuing struggle to meet the needs of the Jewish people in every period and place.³⁶

36. For an exposition of this thesis, see my article, "The Halakhah as a Developing and Pluralistic Phenomenon," (Hebrew) in *Shalhevet*, Journal of Progressive Judaism in Israel, Fall (1987); as well as Robert Gordis, "A Dynamic Halakhah: Principles and Procedures of Jewish Law," JUDAISM, vol. 28, no. 3, (1979): 268-282.

An Unrecognized Part of the Human Anatomy

MARC ROZELAAR

AS THE CANONIZED OLD TESTAMENT, WITH all of its rich diversity, probably comprises only a small part of the Hebrew literature that was produced in ancient times, the scriptures that have come down to us contain a great many words which appear so rarely that their exact meaning cannot be determined with certainty. The occasional textual passages that could shed light on their meaning frequently allow for diverging interpretations, even though only one of these may have been selected in ages past and it acquired, therefore, a linguistic franchise. There may be instances, however, where an intelligent Bible reader reaches the conclusion that this franchise has no justifications and needs to be revoked.

This is the case with the word *raqqáh*, which, traditionally as well as in today's Hebrew vernacular, carries the meaning of "temple (of the head)." The word appears five times in the OT, to wit: Judges (Ju), 4:21-22 and 5:26, and in the Song of Songs (SoS), 4:3b = 6:7. We shall first examine the identical references in SoS. The relevant sections of 4:3b and 6:7, describing one of the attractions of the Beloved, are usually rendered: "Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks." I have always found it incomprehensible how the temple of the head of a beautiful girl can be compared with the moist, red meat of a pomegranate. If the temple is to remind one of a piece of anything, I would think it more likely to be ivory, possibly slightly darkened (cf. SoS 1:5), just as the body of the Lover is compared with a piece of ivory in SoS 5:14b.

Remarkably, a competent and generally admired translator like Martin Buber apparently was at a loss how to handle the word *raqqáh*. This great scholar, who expressly lays down the rule that a Hebrew word appearing in identical form in different passages is to be rendered identically in translations of those passages, renders "temple" in SoS 4:3b as "*Schläfe*," but in 6:7 as "*Wange*," even though, in Hebrew, *raqqáh* is used in both instances. Remarkable also is the fact that the oldest and most prevalent Dutch translation of the Bible, the so-called Statenbijbel, most probably unknown to Buber, displays the same dichotomy. So the question is: how are we to render the word *raqqáh*?¹

1. The author of this paper is of Dutch origin (ed.).

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The solution of the riddle may be found in the book, *Le Cantique des Cantiques enfin expliqué*, by Albert Hazan (Paris 1936). The author points out that the meaning of “temple of the head” for *raqqáh* can not be accepted, neither in the above passages of SoS nor in those referred to in the Book of Judges.

We shall first examine the latter passages as discussed by Hazan, and then revert to SoS. The three passages that interest us here narrate the end of the same story, twice in prose and shortly thereafter in the Song of Deborah, to wit, how Sisera, the defeated commander of the Canaanite army, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of a Kenite, who welcomed him inside and then killed him. The literal translation of the first passage (Ju 4:21) reads as follows in the King James Version: “Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples (?) and fastened it into the ground.” In the second passage (Ju 4:22), where Jael shows the dead Sisera to the victorious Israelite commander Barak, we have a short résumé of the preceding events: “And, behold, . . . Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples (?)” The third and last passage (Ju 5:26) reads: “She (Jael) put her hand to the nail/ and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer;/ and with the hammer she smote (*hālēmáh*) Sisera,/ she smote off (*māāqáh*) his head,/ when she had pierced (*māḥṣāḥ*) and stricken through (*hālēfáh*) his temples (?) (*raqqātó*).”

It is significant that in the King James (and other English) versions of the OT “temples” is rendered in the plural, whereas in the Hebrew original (as well as in many translations) the singular *raqqáh/raqqātó* (his temple) is used. The questions arise: 1) Why do the extremely exact Hebrew descriptions repeatedly mention one temple, where they could just as well have used the plural? 2) Even if it were written explicitly that the tent peg was “fastened . . . into the ground” (end 4:21), would Jael have really had to penetrate both temples?

There is yet another and totally different consideration. According to a traditional Jewish — and euphemistic — interpretation of Ju 5:25: “He asked water, and she gave him milk,” Jael permitted the exhausted Sisera to have intercourse with her, cf. 5:27, which repeats the description, as it has to be translated literally and verbatim: “Between her feet he knelt” (see Job 31:10 in Hebrew). After the act of intercourse “he fell, he lay down.” The question is, how did he lie down? If someone has to sleep on the hard soil without a headrest — as I know from personal experience — he will not lie on his side but on his back. Assuming that the exhausted Sisera did the same, it may be supposed that he was sleeping with his mouth open, whether he snored or not. Looking at it this way, Jael’s actions take on a different, more natural aspect and more in tune with the text: she holds the peg above Sisera’s open mouth and strikes it with the heavy hammer, driving it through his mouth cavity (and throat) into the ground.

Thus we have the answer to the double question: what is the meaning of *raqqáh* and why does it appear in the singular in three passages in the Book of Judges. But there is more to it. Nowadays it is generally known that stories and poems from early religious texts were recited; they were intended not for the eye, but for the ear. One also knows that in the time of the Church Fathers a person reading by himself in a room would read aloud. Even today, the weekly portion of the Torah is recited in all synagogues on the basis of age-old musical annotations. If we attempt to read aloud the second part of Ju 5:26, using our knowledge of the original pronunciation of the Hebrew language, it appears that this ingeniously onomatopoeic part of the verse contains six deep guttural consonants in the series of verbs (see transcriptions above) concluding with the word *raq-qātó*, to wit *h - ḥ* (a deep throaty ch) - *q* (a deep throaty k) - *ḥ - ḥ - q*, strongly suggesting the suffocation of a person, and well-nigh inducing us to hear the death rattle of the expiring Sisera with our own ears.

In ancient times it was already a known fact that penetration of the mouth was a fatal injury for men and animals alike. A mural in the death chamber of Tut-Ankh-Amon depicts the Pharaoh thrusting his lance into the open muzzle of a lion already hit by his arrow. A famous Assyrian relief shows King Assurbanipal astride his horse, killing a lion in the same fashion at the moment when the animal, with open mouth, jumps at him. We might add that modern man not infrequently chooses a shot in the mouth as the most effective way of ending his life.

I may conclude with a linguistic point in support of the theory presented. Although Brown-Driver-Briggs in their *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* favor an etymology of the word *raqqáh* — as meaning “temple (of the head)” — from a Semitic root *rqq*, “be thin,” which appears only in derivatives, they present a second, homonymic root *rqq*, meaning “spit” (Lev. 15:8), with the derivative *roq*, “spittle” (Is. 50:6; Job 7:19; 30:10). It is obvious that in the light of our observations this second etymology is to be considered the only correct one.

We now revert to the Song of Songs and will attempt to find in this book, as well, arguments in favor of the meaning of *raqqáh* as we found it to be in the Book of Judges, arguments which can also be relevant to SoS 4:3b and 6:7. Considering first of all a number of contexts in which the attractions of the Lover and the Beloved are described, we find that these descriptions are always arranged in a certain direction, either from top to bottom or from below upwards. We find, e.g., in SoS 5:11-15, a number of the physical charms of the Lover, listed from top to bottom: his locks black as a raven (11), his eyes (12), his cheeks and his lips (13), his hands (arms) and his belly (14) and his legs (15). Each part appears with appropriate comparative attributes. The beauties of the Beloved in SoS 7:2-6 are paraded in the other direction, commencing at her feet and culminating in the hair of her head. The systematic arrangement of the descriptions is significant, since it is present also in the two passages where the

word *raqqáh* appears and must be recognized as a consciously applied stylistic element. The various charms of the Beloved are clearly described from top to bottom in these passages — SoS 4:1b-5 and 6:5b-7 — albeit, in the latter, they are slightly abridged. Thus we read in 4:1b-5 successively of the eyes and the hair (1b), the teeth (2), the lips, the mouth (as organ of speech: *midbārēkh*) (3a), the temple (?) (3b), the neck (4) and the breasts (5). In the short résumé in 6:5b-7, the order is the eyes and the hair (5b), the teeth (6) and the temple (?) (7). Both in the first, detailed description and in the second, abridged version it is clearly evident that in translating *raqqáh* as “temple,” the systematically descending row of extolled properties is suddenly reversed on behalf of one particular part of the head and then resumes the original direction — something to be totally rejected.

On the other hand, translating *raqqáh* as “oral cavity” or “open mouth” — the meaning we found in Judges — fits exactly between the mouth as organ of speech (4:3a) and the neck (4:4) in the first description, and after the teeth (6:6) in the second one. However, the fact that *raqqáh* with the meaning just established appears in the most appropriate position, is not the only confirmation that this meaning is the correct one where the SoS is concerned. Already standing by itself, the words “oral cavity” or “open mouth” as equivalents of *raqqáh* afford an unexpected understanding of the narrower and broader contexts in which the word appears, an understanding so revealing that it completely justifies this interpretation.

In order to set the stage for this revelation we should, once more, take SoS 4:3b as our point of departure and, specifically, the Hebrew original: *kēpēlah̄ hā-rimmôn raqqātēkh̄*. The word *raqqáh* needs no further clarification (*raqqātēkh̄* = your *raqqáh*). It may be useful, however, to shed some light on the preceding words. First of all, the word *rimmôn*, “pomegranate.” In order to understand this passage, one should know that this fruit has a deep-red, juicy meat, containing a large number of small, grey pips, so that the overall aspect becomes a moist, pinkish red. When the fruit ripens, it usually cracks, revealing the inside, which indeed resembles an open mouth. With regard to the word *pēlah̄* — it is virtually impossible to attach to it the meaning “piece” or “slice” or even “segment,” for, unlike citrus fruit, the pomegranate does not naturally split up into segments. Thus the only correct translation for *pēlah̄* is “fissure” or “split,” which Buber rendered correctly as “*Riss*.” The etymological correctness of this translation is confirmed by the meaning of the Arab word *fellach* (peasant) and by the Arab and Hebrew root *f* (or *p*)-*l*-*ch*, which is identical with the English word “*plough*,” indicating an implement that splits the earth. This is an interesting case of an agricultural term, the root of which is shared in Semitic and Indo-german languages — cf. also the German “Pflug” and the Dutch “ploeg.”

Recapitulating, how should the first part of SoS 4:3b and 6:7 be rendered? The answer can be only as follows: “Thine open mouth is like the

fissure of a pomegranate.” Using this translation, we also have a better understanding of various passages in SoS, the meaning of which eluded us previously. For a correct understanding of these passages, however, we must first of all attempt to divest ourselves of theological, exegetical, “moral” and other prejudices and recognize that the SoS presents us with an honest and candid sensuality, expressing an unalloyed joy in the activity of kissing, evidenced already in the second verse of the book. There is no need to demonstrate that these are not the kisses exchanged between children, but those of lovers adoring each other with all their soul (cf. SoS 8:6,7). Resuming our previous tenor, we see the Beloved addressing her Lover (8:2b): “I would cause thee to drink of the spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.” In Hebrew: *Ašqēkhā miyyáyin hā-rēqah, mē^cassīs rim-mōnî*. Now that we have seen that, in the metaphor of the SoS, the open mouth of the attractive Shulamit — “I am black, but comely” is her self-description in 1:5 — is compared and tantamount to a fissured pomegranate, it is clear what her intentions are when she promises her lover to let him partake of the “juice of (her) pomegranate.” And if we remember, from the strongly onomatopoetic verse in the Song of Deborah (Ju 5:26), the large degree of sensitivity which Old Testament man must have displayed for sound and assonance, then we can imagine that the word *rēqah*, “spiced” in verse SoS 8:2b cited above in Hebrew and English, was seen as being allied to the word *raqqáh* because of the phonetic proximity of the two, and that it is no coincidence that it appears so close to the word *rim-mōnî*, which, in turn, solicits an association with *raqqáh* and, thus, with *rēqah* as well. Rendering these somewhat cryptic observations in intelligible English, we see that the Shulamit indubitably meant to use “spiced wine” in the same sense as the immediately following “juice of (her) pomegranate.”

Whoever is prepared to accept this interpretation will be provided with additional means towards a better understanding of the SoS, where wine is mentioned repeatedly, sometimes literally and sometimes in the figurative sense. The attentive reader will be pleasantly occupied in investigating which usage is applied when, and where. Assistance in this endeavor is, however, beyond the task of the author of this article, who neither should, nor would, transgress its borderline.

Sparks

(after a poem of Solomon ibn Gabirol)

DAVID SPARENBERG

Master, maker of infinite convolutions —

who can contain Your unbounded might,
when the prowess of Your swirling glory
did create irradiant light
hewn from the quarry of living rock,
and dug from the mine of pure sublimity?

When on this spot You did sit
discerning thought,
and call the conscious wonder
soul?

When You, and You alone,
fashioned it from the flames of fire
of deep intelligence?
And its energy is as fire, burning within,
ardent, pure, and wise of heart.

You did set this primal spark within the flesh,
to serve as guardian.
And it is as fire, burning within.
And yet like light,
does not consume; it does not burn
the burnable part!

Who then, Lord, is like unto You,
ardent, pure, and wise of heart?

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“Conspicuous Consumption” at Jewish Functions

ARYEH SPERO

RISING AFFLUENCE WITHIN THE JEWISH community has spawned, in some cases, an attendant exhibition of opulence and ostentation at *semahot* such as weddings and bar-mitzvahs. Observing some of today's parties, one is reminded of Ahasuerus' lavish and excessive feast where "he displayed his riches . . . and wine flowed in abundance and variety."¹

Entering plush halls, today's guest spends the ensuing few hours in a cocooned, fantasy-like ambience amidst extravagant displays and color schemes projecting the function's particular "theme." Guests indulge in rich viennese-tables after having just eaten a multi-course meal offering either beef, veal, chicken or fish, all the while imbibing an array of spirits and wines. All of this happens under the lights of video-camera crews who film the event for posterity. These *semahot* have become distasteful, even embarrassing.

To be sure, there are some explanations, though not justifications, for these excesses. The primacy that Jewish parents have historically placed on their children's growth and attainments is given ventilation at such milestone events. For many, such events are long-anticipated and represent the apex of their years of child-raising.

Additionally, whereas other religions have allowed ancient (pagan) carnival festivities to develop into sanctified religious pageantries, and whereas other cultures have produced Mardi Gras, Judaism has not. The bombastic bar-mitzvah or wedding party has become, to some extent, the allowed and sanctified outlet for carnival and Mardi Gras-like cravings, catering to the need for epic celebration and revelry, instead of, what should be, moments for deep, inner spiritual-familial joy.

Plagued also by a need to convince others, and themselves, that they have "made it" in America, many individuals believe that such evidence is affirmed in acquisitions and showy demonstrations of material trappings, and by their ability to live and entertain lavishly.

Still others are driven by a need to keep pace publicly with their neighbors and friends or by a desire to live up to expected and fashionable community standards; to do otherwise would render them conspicu-

1. *Megillat Esther* 1:4, 7.

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ously “poor.” These pressures, however, can eventuate in protracted debt and strain for many families unable to afford these \$30-40,000 outlays. Many have mortgaged their future years for a mere five hours of hoped-for acceptance. The Rabbis, ever-mindful of man’s social insecurities, responsibly warned that even the purchase of actual *mizvah* objects should not exceed one-fifth of one’s personal savings, let alone the incurring of heavy debt for celebrations.² Finally, there are those who, engaging in pious platitudes, rationalize and even countenance their extravagances, citing the noble motif of *hiddur mizvah*, glorifying *mizvot*. They claim that such embellishments enhance these *mizvah* activities.

The following paragraphs will investigate if the claim of *hiddur mizvah* is applicable and valid here. And secondly, if it is not — or even if it is — are precedents available that empower the Rabbinic community to constrain such excesses?

II.

The proposition that *mizvot* should be performed with glory originates in a verse in the Song of Moses: “This is my God and I will glorify Him.”³ While many interpretations abound as to how this glorification is manifest, all concur that it is not a Biblical injunction, but, rather, a practice whose support (the Rabbis were wont somehow to tie all Judaic practices to verses in Torah) is merely alluded to in Torah, an *a’smakhtah*.⁴

Abba Saul argues that one glorifies God by emulating His merciful dispositions, that being the goal of all *mizvot*: “As God is compassionate and exercises grace, so should man.”⁵ A life lived in *Imitatio Dei* is one that sanctifies — glorifies — the position of God. It is not the *mizvot*, per se, that need to be glorified, but God. This is achieved by living according to the themes portrayed in the many *mizvot*. Indeed, this motif is expressed and verified in the word, *an’veihu* (glorify) itself: when broken in two, it can be read *a’ni-vehu*, I and He, human emulating God.⁶

Others are less catholic in their interpretation and limit the directive of the verse to one’s general approach and conduct toward *mizvot*: *mizvot* should be performed not casually but deliberately, not haphazardly but with dignity. For example, the *lulav*, myrtle and willow should be neatly arranged — bound — into one coherent unit;⁷ Torah scrolls should be first etched with grooven lines so that the written verses will be straight and the columns evenly-blocked; and, when writing God’s name, cognizance and consciousness should prevail so that the Name will not be smudged or require erasure.⁸ Thus, God is glorified when one

2. *Ketubot* 50a.

3. Exodus 15:2.

4. *Ibid.*, *Torah Temimah*.

5. *Shabbat* 133b.

6. *Ibid.*, Rashi.

7. *Sukkah* 33a.

approaches His mizvot with deliberation and *kavanah*, intent and sincerity.

In a similar vein, the Talmud comments that one's *sukkah* should be strong not flimsy; one's *lulav* fresh; one's fringes clean.⁹ In other words, God is glorified when man serves Him — performs mizvot — in a manner commensurate with what man expects for himself: cleanliness, order, caring.

In light of these interpretations, the excesses rampant at today's *simḥah* celebrations are simply that — excesses — wholly unrelated to, and not vindicated in, any of the themes implicit in “This is my God and I will Glorify Him.”

III.

There is, however, a popular view elucidated in the Talmud that does, in fact, maintain that glory to God is achieved by embellishing and adorning mizvah-objects, or by purchasing higher-priced mizvah items more apt to be exquisite.¹⁰ But many contend that this applies to the etrog only, since the etrog is uniquely characterized as the beautiful fruit, the fruit of *hadar*; since beauty is its stamp, the more exquisite the better.¹¹

While others do extend to all religious objects the suggestion to embellish and purchase generously,¹² nevertheless, it devolves on mizvah objects only, and not to mizvah-related practices. Thus, one's phylacteries or a Torah, etc. should be embellished or of higher quality, but not one's wedding or bar-mizvah. Moreover, these “celebrations” are neither intrinsic to the mizvah nor direct-issues of a Biblical commandment. In fact, unlike the *huppah* or *aliyah*, the excesses discussed herein are not mizvot at all. They cannot even be classified as *hekhsher-mizvah*, ancillary to the mizvah, since the essential *huppah* or *aliyah* can be completed without these trappings: they do not augment the actual performance of the mizvah.

This becomes even more obvious and explicit after examining a Mishnah in *Tamid*. Spurred by the verse, “This is my God and I will glorify Him,” the Mishnah delineates a deliberate and elaborate procedure for the skinning and slicing of the Paschal lamb that is designed to infuse dignity and procedure into what, absent that, could have become haphazard.¹³ However, once that portion of the sacrifice dedicated to God has been burnt and disposed of, the remaining flesh — to be eaten by the family who brought the sacrifice — is no longer governed by any procedural regulation. Why? As the Talmud explains, only that which is directly ded-

8. *Shabbat* 133b.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, as explained in *Baba Kama* 9a.

11. Leviticus 23:40; *Baba Kama* 9b, *Rabbeinu Tam*.

12. *Baba Kama* 9b, Rashi; see *Magen Avraham* 656:1.

13. *Ta'mid* 4:2, Rashi; *Shabbat* 133b.

icated to God falls under the purview of “I will glorify Him,” while that which is for man’s personal gratification does not — even though the eating of the Paschal lamb was Biblically prescribed, and although God and man joined, each in his own way, in the very same object. If the Biblically prescribed eating of the Paschal lamb is not accorded the status of *hiddur-mizvah*, then, certainly, the arbitrary bar-mizvah or wedding celebration is not; even more so since these extravaganzas are intended to glorify not God but man’s ego and to provide him with a good time. Simply because a celebration has a connection with, and takes place in, the same building where the *huppah* or *aliyah* previously took place does not elevate it to the status of *hiddur-mizvah*: even the paschal unit was divided into *hiddur* and non-*hiddur* dimensions.

IV.

Aware of how these excesses may be financially debilitating for members of the community, can something be done? There are, in fact, a host of precedents demonstrating how, in the past, Rabbinical Courts placed constraints even on expenditures for mizvah objects or practices when it became apparent that certain members of the community were being financially strangled by such costs.

Most notable was Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel’s legislation which tantamountly circumvented a mizvah procedure.¹⁴ Where historically a woman was required to offer a pair of doves for each child that she bore — and, thus, for example, five dove-offerings for five births — he modified the obligation to one pair of dove-offerings for five births (miscarriages) in circumstances where women were unable to journey to Jerusalem after earlier births, hence accumulating a debt of five offerings. He did so because merchants had hiked-up dove prices in reaction to heavy demand. His ruling, designed to dampen demand, effectively brought prices down. Apparently, then, the Rabbis were empowered to issue legislation to scale-down expenditures that created debilitating or strained consequences.

However, while this may be a moral precedent, it is, in a technical sense, quite different from our situation, for the question arises under what authority did Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel abrogate a Pentateuchal law, even if motivated by compassion? Reasoning that if prices remained prohibitive women would be unable to perform the mizvah, he relied on the verse, “It is time to act for the Lord, they have broken Thy law.”¹⁵ Ironically, at times, one must *temporarily* suspend the law in order to preserve it. Had he not interfered, many women would have been forever deprived of performing their mizvah. Here, however, the existing extravagances and high costs connected with wedding or bar-mizvah celebra-

14. *Keritot*, end of Chapt. 1 (8a) — Leviticus 12:8.

15. Psalms 119:126.

tions do not inhibit one's ability to get married or to recite the *b'rakhah* or *haftarah*. Realistically, one can still have a *huppah* and even a *se'udat mizvah*, even though others choose to spend heavily on peripheral extravagances. Other familiar cases where the Rabbis set limits on financial outlays involve mourning practices. In *Moed Katan* the Talmud enumerates numerous *taqqanot* that were enacted so that the poor could engage in prevailing mizvah activities as well as be spared embarrassment.¹⁶ For example, where formerly the wealthy brought food to mourners in baskets of silver and gold and served drinks in crystal-like glasses, the Rabbis decreed that henceforth food brought to a house of mourning be delivered in plain, twigged baskets, and that drinks served there be poured into plain, colored glasses. They did so in order that the poor, possessing modest utensils only, would not be so embarrassed that they would eschew bringing food altogether.

So, too, did Rabban Gamaliel, by example, stop the use of highly adorned caskets and expensive shrouds; after this death, plain coffins and standard linen shrouds became conventional.¹⁷ In fact, the Talmud insightfully remarks that, until that time, the high cost of funerals created greater anguish among some poor families than did the actual death of their relative.¹⁸ In many ways, this is similar to the proverbial situation wherein the father's joy is subdued the moment he gives thought to how he is going to pay for the wedding or bar-mizvah.

Certainly, those who are comfortable with a halakhic process which uses a latitudinal approach may well find in the above-mentioned cases precedents for rectifying practices and styles that are in need of change. However, those who approach halakhah in a purely technical manner will, again, find the analogy to these cases weak, for these enactments were promulgated to provide the poor with opportunities to perform the mizvot connected with burial and mourning. Absent these *taqqanot*, the poor would not have participated in the mizvah of feeding the mourner and, unable to afford expensive coffins and shrouds, would have, as the Talmud explains, saddled society with the funeral bill.¹⁹ But, as previously mentioned regarding the dove-offering, such fears do not apply here since (1) the high cost of an opulent wedding celebration does not prevent one who is willing to forgo these extraneous amenities from fulfilling the mizvah portion of a wedding or bar-mizvah, and (2), if done moderately these celebrations are, generally, affordable to all and, thus, society is freed of the prospect of paying-off individual debts.

Surely there are those who would suggest that for the sake of egalitarianism, today's Rabbis should impose constraints and limitations — that all *semaḥot* be standardized — so that no one will feel unequal. However,

16. *Mo'ed Katan* 27a.

17. *Mo'ed Katan* 27b.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

when reviewing the aforementioned cases it is obvious that the Rabbis never employed theories of egalitarianism or social-equivalizing as their rationale or motivation. The motivation was that without such decrees people would have been deprived of performing their particular *mizvah*. While some have, indeed, exploited these enactments for ideological-political purposes, the fact remains that whereas the Rabbis could have simply justified their legislation by invoking “a need to fashion parity and equivalence among men,” they did not.

V.

Still, in spite of this, medieval rabbinical courts did, at times, legislate constraints on expenditures, even those involving *mizvot*. Citing the aforementioned decree of Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel (regarding the dove-offering) a prominent Rabbi asked his community to refrain from purchasing fish for Shabbat when it became evident that the weekly demand raised the price of regular fish beyond reasonable levels.²⁰ Similarly, Rabbis requested that individuals refrain from purchasing higher-priced *etrogim* in the hope of deflating prices to levels within everyone’s reach.²¹ Thus, if proof can be brought verifying how the willingness, by so many, to spend lavishly on celebrations has resulted in inflated prices for even the ordinary *simḥah* essentials, or that halls are reluctant to fix dates with mere average prospects in the hope of securing more profitable clients, then, impositions on spending would be justified. For if the purchase of higher-priced *mizvah* items was proscribed in order to keep prices within levels accessible to all, then, a fortiori, spending for extraneous accessories should be constrained if it engenders inflated prices for items essential to the actualization of a *simḥah* or, worse, generates a lock-out, by halls and caterers, upon those unable to match wealthier customers.

VI.

Two other principles appear relevant in guiding the discussion. The first is the wish to spare Israel expense and not to overburden them with great cost or strain: Judaism is *has al mamon yisrael*, considerate of the income of Israel; it disdains waste.

Thus, the mouthpiece of the shofar that was used during communal fasts was overlaid not with gold but silver;²² neither was the urn in which were deposited the lots for the two goats on Yom Kippur made of gold.²³ These are but two of many similar examples. Perhaps, then, in deference to this principle, Rabbis should impose spending limitations in order to protect Israel against waste.

20. *Magen Avraham: Arukh Hayyim* 242:1.

21. *Magen Avraham: Arukh Hayyim* 656:1.

22. *Rosh HaShanah* 27a.

23. *Yoma* 39a.

However, in relation to our case, such analogies are tenuous. For, in the cited circumstances, the law merely freed collective Israel of the burden of supplying gold to the Temple for those objects where no particular metal was Biblically prescribed. This particular proposition, however, does not, in itself, empower Rabbis to deprive individuals of free-will or the right to spend whatever they want on items that they choose to purchase. Absent any proof that excessive expenditures for weddings hurt others, *has al mamon yisrael* should not be used as a device to control individuals' spending habits.

The other principle that relates to this discussion is *Tikkun Olam*, doing what has to be done for the collective good or public welfare. The seriousness with which this principle is regarded becomes most salient when observing how, again, even a Biblical law was temporarily waived for the sake of the collective good.

Land in Israel that had been previously sold to a non-Jew but was repurchased later by a Jew retained its status regarding *bikkurim*, first fruits: biblically, first fruits had to be brought by the new Jewish owner. Realizing that these parcels still retained their special-holy status, non-Jewish parcel-holders demanded exorbitant prices from Jews wishing to purchase — redeem — them. Naturally, such high asking-prices made it difficult for Jews to repurchase these plots. In an effort to bring prices down so that Judean land would revert to Jewish ownership, the Rabbis temporarily suspended Torah law by demoting these parcels and declaring that *bikkurim* would no longer be required from such lands if they were repurchased.²⁴ (Interestingly, parcels were more desirable if they brought with them religious obligation — the reverse of what one would have expected.)

Thus, *Tikkun Olam* appears to be the appropriate vehicle from which Rabbis can issue the proclamations needed to stem the distasteful excesses prevalent at today's *semahot*. Certainly, the collective good demands that a stopper be placed on these extravagances even if they do not jeopardize the ability of others adequately to fulfill the intrinsic *mizvah* portions of weddings and bar-mitzvahs.

VII.

However, the means of doing so should come through rabbinic persuasion, not magisterial legislation. First, because Rabbis must be ever-cautious of legislating that which the public may be unwilling to abide.²⁵ Just as the Rabbis were reluctant to issue additions overriding the public will, so must Rabbis equally refrain from legislating controls that the public may not accept.

Second, Rabbinic legislation would certainly lead to “excessive entan-

24. *Gittin* 47 a, b.

25. *Baba Batra* 60b.

gements.” Are the Rabbis to determine how many pieces in the band or flowers on the table, or courses in the menu? To impose an expenditure limit would be impossible, given that wedding costs depend on location or the number of guests and a host of other unique, personal considerations. Such monitoring would only trivialize the Rabbinate and leave it open to ridicule, thereby diminishing the few powers that it still retains.

Third, just as most Rabbis are reluctant to impose or expand religious obligations, so should they, in principle, be wary of imposing limits on free-will where no dishonest conduct is involved. Legislating in the name of ethics may also be inappropriate since some would so subjectify ethics as to pronounce it unethical to enjoy oneself to degrees that others cannot.

Suasion by pulpit Rabbis, writers and speakers, if done across the country over prolonged periods will, however, have an efficacious impact. The numerous precedents listed herein may well be helpful in such a campaign. Their “technical” applicability matters only when weighing their veracity as pure precedents; however, they remain powerful moral and persuasive references.

What demoralizes is how these ostentatious frivolities reflect that, among many of us, there exists a lack of maturity, finesse, good-taste and grace; that there is a spiritual vapidness and yearning for “something.” While morbidity and preoccupation with the Temple’s destruction are no longer as pressing, perhaps, we have still traveled a little too far from the post-Vespasian era when even the colors of the head-bands of bride and groom’s were muted.²⁶

26. *Sotah* 49a.

Four Writers Look at Israel

Review-Essay by **RAPHAEL DANZIGER**

The Other Walls: The Politics of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. By HAROLD H. SAUNDERS. Washington, D.C. American Enterprise Institute, 1985. 179 pages.

Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter's Notebook. By WOLF BLITZER. New York. Oxford University Press, 1985. 259 pages.

Israel's Lebanon War. By ZE'EV SCHIFF & EHUD YA'ARI. Edited and translated by Ina Friedman. New York. Simon & Schuster, 1984. 320 pages. Paperback, \$7.95.

Israel the Partitioned State: A Political History Since 1900. By AMOS PERLMUTTER. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985. 398 pages. \$19.95.

OF THE HUNDREDS OF BOOKS ABOUT ISRAEL and the Arab-Israeli conflict published in recent years, each one of the four under review stands out in its own way. Saunders' for its thoughtful analysis of conflict resolution; Blitzer's for its intimate look at American-Israeli relations; Schiff and Ya'ari's for its devastatingly incisive examination of Israel's disastrous war in Lebanon; and Perlmutter's for its thorough investigation of the internal political debates attending Israel's struggle for independence and security.

As a CIA, National Security Council, and State Department veteran of twenty-two years, including three years as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, and as a Yale Ph.D. conducting academic research at the American Enterprise Institute since 1981, Harold H. Saunders has brought formidable practical experience and academic credentials to his book on the Arab-Israeli conflict. He set out to perform two major tasks: To construct a conceptual framework of peace processes in general; and to apply this framework to the Israeli-Arab, or, as he sees it, the Israeli-Palestinian, conflict. Unfortunately, whereas the book's general framework makes a significant contribution to the state of the art, its particular case study is seriously flawed.

In designing his analytical framework of peace processes, Saunders correctly emphasizes the importance of pre-negotiating phases. Given the

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stagnation of the Middle East peace process since Egypt's abandonment of the Camp David-stipulated autonomy negotiations with Israel in 1982, the most urgent need is, indeed, to consider ways to bring the parties to the negotiating table.

Having put his finger on the main problem, Saunders aptly identifies the major obstacles to its resolution: As asserted by Egypt's late President, Anwar Sadat, "the other walls" blocking the path to peace are mainly psychological — fear, mistrust, hatred, and misunderstanding. A prerequisite for starting actual peace talks is the breaking of those other walls — that is, the creation of at least a modicum of trust and understanding between the parties to the conflict.

As President Sadat's historic visit to Israel in 1977 demonstrated, the "other walls" must be breached by political leaders; only then do the diplomats, negotiators, and mediators stand a chance of success. Saunders presents a sequence of preparatory phases that any would-be peacemaker would be well advised to follow in preparing the stage for actual peace negotiations.

To sum up very briefly, Saunders' schema requires three pre-negotiating stages: Defining the problem; developing a commitment to negotiations; and arranging the actual negotiation. After these stages have been completed, the parties are ready to sit down and conduct the actual peace negotiations. Once they have come to an agreement, the final phase of the peace process — implementing the peace treaty — may begin.

As a heuristic device, Saunders' conceptual framework is truly admirable. It neatly proceeds from one step to the next in a logical sequence; there is no doubt that any peace process moving forward according to this plan would be well constructed, solid, and durable. Saunders has been unsuccessful, however, in his attempt to fit the protracted, intractable, and immensely complex Arab-Israeli conflict into his theoretical framework.

In dealing with that conflict, which, as indicated above, he prefers to view as essentially one between Palestinians and Israelis, the author displays a fundamental bias against Israel which seriously mars the entire analysis. He refers to the "unique concession the Palestinians have been asked to make in accepting the Jewish state in Palestine" and calls for an "act of nobility on the Palestinians' side that cedes land for the Jewish state." To Saunders, then, the Jews are not entitled to any rights in Palestine and Israel is no more than a usurper entity whose right to exist as a Jewish state — even just within its 1949 Armistice Lines — depends on a Palestinian "act of nobility." 3,000 years of Jewish attachment to the land, let alone a century of hard work to restore Jewish life in the country, are thus erased from the record. Conversely, in conferring on the Palestinians absolute rights to the entire land, Saunders ignores the shallow roots of today's Palestinians in the country, much of whose population had

often been virtually eradicated by natural or man-made disasters and had then been replenished by immigrants from neighboring countries who had never acquired any specific non-Jewish political identity. In presenting the Arab-Israeli conflict as one between total right (the Palestinians') versus total wrong (the Jews') rather than the tragic clash between two partial rights that has been its hallmark, Saunders has seriously distorted the fundamental character of the problem.

Although he is deeply sympathetic toward Israel's security needs and the Israelis' craving for acceptance and recognition, Saunders' primary identification with the Palestinians leads him to a description of their positions that clearly reflects a desire to present them in a positive light rather than a strict adherence to the true state of affairs. Thus, he terms the PLO a "liberation movement" although its "constitution," the Palestine National Charter, explicitly calls for the destruction of Israel. Later on, when referring to the Charter, he misrepresents its language and significance. According to Saunders it calls for a "binational state in Palestine," when, in fact, it describes Palestine as the "homeland of the Palestinian Arab people" and as "an indivisible part of the Arab nation" (Article 1), and he says that the resolutions passed by the Palestine National Council (the PLO's "parliament") since 1974 "in a sense supersede the Charter," whereas in each of the PNC's meetings since 1968 the Charter was formally reaffirmed.

He goes on to say that

[s]ince 1982, some Palestinians . . . have understood that Israel, the United States, and even Jordan are not ready to accept an independent Palestinian state. They have been willing to try to negotiate . . . governing themselves within a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

As even a cursory glance at the dictionary would indicate, this is no concession at all. A confederation is nothing more than "a group of independent nations, states, or tribes more or less permanently united by a treaty or alliance for joint action (as for defense against a common enemy)" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*).

"Whether or not they formally recognize Israel in public declaration," Saunders says, "most Palestinian leaders speak from a map of the Middle East in their mind's eye that includes Israel." While it is very hard to fathom the PLO leaders' "mind's eye," the map from which they speak in their Charter is there for all to see: "Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit" (Article 2). No room for Israel in *this* map. The same goes for Saunders' claim that

the mainstream of the Palestine National Council and the portion of the PLO that Yasser Arafat consolidated in Tunis after 1982 and 1983 expulsions from Lebanon take the position that peace can be made with an Israel defined by the 1967 borders.

This may be the position of some PLO leaders in their "mind's eye," or even in private utterances to Westerners; it is definitely not the PLO's

position in any public statements, let alone in its binding Charter. And, finally, Saunders terms the February 1985 Hussein-Arafat agreement “an important milestone” in which Israel is, in effect, recognized. In fact, the agreement was scrubbed in February 1986 after Hussein accused the PLO of renegeing on its commitments, and Israel had not even been mentioned in its text.

To sum up: As a Baedeker of ways to promote peace processes in their pre-negotiating phases *The Other Walls* is entirely successful; it has earned a place on the shelf of any head of government who is considering involvement or is actually engaged in a peace process. But, as a guide to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the book is seriously flawed by a one-sided view of it as a struggle between (Palestinian) right versus (Israeli) might and by the consequent palliation of the PLO’s fundamentally politicidal (to use Yehoshafat Harkabi’s term) position toward Israel.

To compare Saunders’ *The Other Walls* with Blitzer’s *Between Washington and Jerusalem* seems, at first glance, almost like comparing apples and oranges. Whereas Saunders’ book is an analytical work intended mainly for the elite foreign policy establishment, Blitzer’s is a largely descriptive one, clearly designed to appeal to the general public. Indeed, as an American Jewish journalist working for an Israeli newspaper (*Jerusalem Post*), Blitzer’s background is worlds apart from that of Saunders, who is a Presbyterian Elder, most of whose professional life has been spent at the U.S. State Department. In a curious way, however, the two books provide an almost exact mirror image of each other. Saunders’ basic identification with the Palestinians has turned his work into a subliminal appeal to Americans to adopt a more sympathetic attitude toward the Palestinians’ political aspirations. Blitzer, who completely identifies with the Israelis, makes an equally subtle appeal to his American readers to back Israel.

In the Preface, Blitzer describes *Between Washington and Jerusalem* as a “volume exclusively focusing on the limits of the relationship between the two nations.” His principal thesis is that “. . . close ties serve the national interests of both countries” even though they do not “always agree on every important issue; . . . differences . . . are not permitted to shake the foundations of the overall alliance . . . [R]upture is highly unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.” While briefly referring to the moral dimension of the American-Israeli relationship and to the shared values that bind the two nations together, Blitzer’s main purpose is to prove the existence of a “strategic basis for the American-Israeli alliance.”

Indeed, the book’s most original and compelling chapters are those delineating the dimension of the American-Israeli relationship (“Strategic Cooperation” and “The CIA and the Mossad”). Blitzer shows how the United States has “moved impressively in recent years to strengthen its strategic cooperation with Israel.” From joint medical evacuation exercises to progress on coordinated planning, aerial and naval exercises, access points for prepositioning U.S. military equipment in Israel, as well

as frequent visits by U.S. naval vessels to Israeli ports, this “highly visible enhanced military cooperation . . . is in marked contrast” to the previous “deliberate U.S. distancing from the Israeli military.” While Israel’s interest in such military cooperation is self-evident, its strategic value to the United States is far less apparent and has frequently been contested. To explain it, Blitzer argues that Israel’s ability to assemble a 400,000-troop army within 72 hours “partially explains why the United States does not have to maintain a huge ground presence in the Middle East, as it does in Western Europe (300,000 soldiers) and the Far East (150,000 troops).”

As a result of the increasing awareness of these facts in the Pentagon and elsewhere in the Administration, according to an American expert cited by Blitzer, “Israel is becoming integrated into the U.S. global defense system, much like Italy, Turkey, and South Korea. There will be important benefits for both sides.” In Blitzer’s view, “some sort of American-Israeli defense pact is very much a live possibility down the road.”

Of particular interest are the author’s observations on the cooperation between the American and Israeli intelligence communities. He quotes former U.S. Air Force intelligence chief, Major General George F. Keegan (retired), as praising Israel’s “unparalleled intelligence” from which the United States has greatly benefited: “I could not have procured the intelligence on the Soviet air forces, their combat capabilities, their new weapons, their jamming and their electronics and their SAMs with five CIAs.”

In view of the odious Pollard spy scandal, which broke a few months after the publication of Blitzer’s book, his comments on allegedly illegal Israeli spying activities in the United States and on the role of American Jews in these alleged activities are particularly intriguing. He discloses that a discreet arrangement had been made in the 1950s between the CIA and the Mossad to ban covert operations against each other; according to Blitzer, “[d]espite infractions on both sides, U.S. and Israeli intelligence organizations have maintained” the arrangement. As for the “fear that American Jews are leaking information to the Mossad,” says Blitzer, it does not really exist, “because experienced U.S. intelligence officials readily acknowledge that the degree of cooperation between the CIA and the Mossad is already so close that the two organizations do not really have to spy on each other.” To Israel’s acute embarrassment, Jonathan Pollard, an American Jewish employee of U.S. naval intelligence, was caught delivering secret American documents to the Israelis, albeit to a “rogue” intelligence unit running an unauthorized spy operation in the United States. That was definitely more than an “infraction” and, unfortunately, it seems to have revived some of the old fears in the U.S. Defense establishment that American Jews working in sensitive defense or intelligence posts related to the Middle East might leak secrets to the Israelis.

Nonetheless, thus far the aftermath of the Pollard affair has fully

borne out Blitzer's contention that "differences . . . are not permitted to shake the foundations of the overall alliance." Despite angry charges and tough rhetoric, the Administration has acted to minimize the effects of this affair and maintain its close relations with Israel. Even intelligence sharing has reportedly been fully reactivated with hardly any delay.

Blitzer's emphasis on the "hardnose" element of U.S.-Israeli relations — Israel's strategic value to the United States and other tangible benefits — permeates his book. It is presented as a major bone of contention in the struggle within the U.S. bureaucracy over policy toward Israel; as the main argument made by the Israeli Embassy and the pro-Israel lobby in their efforts to "sell" Israel in Washington; as the principal issue in Congress' annual battle over the size and composition of U.S. aid to Israel; and as the foremost reason for Kissinger's, Carter's, and Reagan's support for increasingly high levels of military and economic assistance to Israel. Indeed, it is inconceivable that the Administration and Congress would have allocated nearly a fifth of total U.S. foreign aid to Israel — a nation of only four million people — if not for the conviction that Israel's strategic value and cooperation more than compensate for this enormous expenditure.

All the same, a strong argument can be made that, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the real infrastructure of U.S. support for Israel consists of intangibles, while the tangibles merely constitute the superstructure. This is so because despite the enormous power of the Presidency, the bureaucracy, Congress, and other powerful institutions, in the long run U.S. policies can be sustained only if they are backed by at least minimal public support. And, in most cases, public support is based more on perceived moral considerations than on an accountant's calculation of the bottom line or on geopolitical factors.

As long as the basic perception of U.S. public opinion holding Israel as a haven for persecuted Jews and as an enlightened democracy lasts, Blitzer's prediction that "rupture [in the U.S.-Israeli alliance] is highly unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future" will almost certainly hold true. If, however, the forces of extremism and fanaticism ever manage to achieve their goal of turning Israel into a chauvinistic, racist theocracy, even the most compelling arguments about Israel's strategic benefits to the United States will fail to maintain U.S. support for it. An unmistakable indication that this is so was provided by the Lebanon war of 1982. Despite the Administration's declarations that the Israeli operation benefitted American interests by defeating the pro-Soviet Syrian and PLO forces in Lebanon, the widely-held perception of excessive Israeli brutality in the war caused a sharp — albeit temporary — drop in Israel's ratings in U.S. public opinion polls.

Thus far, *Israel's Lebanon War*, by Schiff and Ya'ari, remains the best overall presentation of that unfortunate episode. Coming from two outstanding Israeli reporters whose dedication to Israel is beyond doubt, the

book is a devastatingly effective indictment of the Israeli operation in Lebanon. While the then defense minister Ariel Sharon is cast as the chief villain, few other Israeli participants are spared. Even the U.S. Administration is chided for failing to convey to the Israelis its unequivocal opposition to a massive invasion of Lebanon.

On the basis of numerous interviews with key Israeli, Lebanese, and American officials, copious documentation and press reports, the authors have put together an exceptionally detailed account to substantiate their indictment — perhaps too detailed. The wealth of information of highly confidential matters — including direct quotations from internal PLO discussions and even such divulgements as, “Abu Iyad [chief of PLO security] . . . felt engulfed by a wave of despair” — indicate that the authors occasionally resorted to literary license. Furthermore, their heavy reliance on interviews leaves open the possibility of deliberate misinformation slipping into the narrative. Nonetheless, even the operation’s most ardent supporters would be hard put to refute the thrust of the authors’ presentation.

Despite Israel’s deepening involvement in Lebanon since 1976, the 1981-82 crisis could have still been resolved diplomatically if the second Likud government had not appointed Sharon as minister of defense. From the outset, he was determined to implement in Lebanon a “grand design” that he had previously conceived. Beyond the publicly stated goal of pushing the PLO 25 miles from the Israeli borders, he intended to expel the PLO and the Syrians from all of Lebanon and to transform it into a Christian-dominated state that would live in peace with Israel and would form part of the Western alliance. Furthermore, in destroying the PLO in Lebanon, Sharon hoped to remove the last hurdle to Israeli domination of the West Bank.

Being fully aware that this grandiose scheme would never be approved by the Cabinet, Sharon got his way by effectuating a “very subtle one-man coup whereby the Cabinet’s decision-making powers were unilaterally assumed by the defense minister without setting off an alarm.” Exploiting his command over information and “kindling Begin’s profound zeal to penetrate right down to ‘Arafat’s bunker,’” Sharon “dragged the Israeli Cabinet behind him, step by step, into moves that he claimed were dictated by the situation on the ground but were in fact elements of his original grand design.”

According to the authors, the war was a total disaster. Israel lost nearly 600 of its soldiers; its image abroad was tarnished; its economy suffered a serious blow; and the IDF was bogged down in southern Lebanon’s “death trap.” Finally, in the authors’ opinion, “Sharon’s plan was doomed from the start in its failure to appreciate the vehemence of the internal strife in Lebanon.”

Less persuasively, Schiff and Ya’ari make short shrift of the war’s accomplishments. Correctly stating that

the major achievements of the war were and remain the destruction of the PLO's "state-within-a-state" in Lebanon, the elimination of the centers of command and supply for the network of international terrorism and, of course, the removal of the PLO's guns from the range of the Galilee,

they contend that since many Palestinian refugees remain in southern Lebanon and the numerous Shi'ites there have been thoroughly antagonized and radicalized, the area "could well become the seedbed of a new wave of terrorism." And, since a strong Lebanese government is not in the offing, Lebanon cannot permanently rid itself of the PLO. However, a strong case can be made that, despite the endemic communal strife and the Lebanese government's weakness, the war created in Lebanon an effective national consensus against the return of the PLO and, that, even after the Israelis completed their withdrawal from Lebanon, the Shi'ites in the south were loath to provoke punishing Israeli retaliation by initiating or tolerating renewed hostilities across the Israeli borders.

Zbigniew Brzezinski has said that *Israel's Lebanon War* "shatters one's trust in Sharon, Begin, and their American backers, as it renews one's faith in Israel." Bearing in mind a recent remark by Irving Greenberg, made in a different context, that "the health of any society is measured by the critics within it who love it," most friends of Israel will readily subscribe at least to the second part of Brzezinski's assessment.

Another way to measure the health of Israel's society is by examining the development of its political norms, ideas, attitudes, positions, conduct, and institutions — in short, its political culture. That is the ambitious task undertaken by Amos Perlmutter, a former Israeli official who became an American citizen three decades ago and is now a professor of government at the American University in Washington. In his book, *Israel the Partitioned State: A Political History Since 1900*, he traces the country's political history since its inception in the first World Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, with a focus on "the struggle between domestic, ideological, and political groups, and the dominant ideas and issues with which an extraordinary group of men and women struggled as they first tried to create and then to maintain a state."

The work's main theme is that although

[t]he political and economic realities of the Middle East may be startlingly different today, . . . the great debates that wrack contemporary Israel — borders and security, the nature of Eretz Israel, the Palestinian (read Arab) problem — reverberate throughout the political history of Israel in the twentieth century.

Israel's organizing principle is indicated in its title. Perlmutter says he has "offered the concept of the partitioned state as the most efficient and in [his] view perceptive way of dealing with close to a century of a complex political movement and polity." But his use of this concept is somewhat puzzling. He writes that "[s]ince its original establishment as a mandatory, Palestine has been *actually* partitioned three times — in 1947, in 1967, and

again after 1973" (emphasis added). In fact, the 1947 Partition Resolution of the United Nations was never implemented and Palestine was *actually* partitioned only once — in 1949, with the establishment of the Armistice Lines between Israel and her neighbors. In 1967 Israel gained control over all of Palestine — no partition there — and, after 1973, it returned the Sinai to Egypt and part of the Golan Heights to Syria but retained all of Palestine, thus not effecting any repartition of the country. So, in fact, there was only one "partitioned state," lasting from 1949 to 1967, and not three as Perlmutter contends.

This, however, does not detract from his principal argument: The basic political issues confronting the Jewish community in Israel have remained largely unchanged since the 1930s. In bringing his intimate familiarity with, and deep understanding of, these issues to bear on his book, Perlmutter has rendered a significant contribution to the study of Israel's political history. Whereas two excellent recent books — Ronald Sanders, *The High Walls of Jerusalem* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1983), and Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Siege* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986) — cover essentially the same ground (Sanders from 1914 through 1917, and O'Brien from 1917 to the present) as viewed from the outside in, Perlmutter's *Israel* is a view from the inside out. Its main strength is, therefore, in describing the debate within Israel, not the policies of the foreign powers impacting on its history.

Today's division in Israel between supporters and opponents of a territorial compromise (or, to use Perlmutter's term, a partitioned Palestine) goes back almost exactly half a century, when the Zionists split into two camps. The forerunners of today's pro-partition Labor Party, Social Zionists like David Ben-Gurion, supported partition as the only practical way to achieve a Jewish state. The predecessors of today's Likud Party (or, more precisely, of the hard-line Herut faction within the Likud), the Revisionist Zionists under the leadership of Zeev Jabotinsky, vehemently rejected partition. In 1937, the Zionists debated the partition plan of the British government's Peel Commission, which offered the Jews a tiny state extending roughly from Metula to Ashkelon. The British themselves shelved the plan. And, since 1967, after securing a Jewish state more than three times the size of that proposed by the Peel Commission, the Israelis have been debating the feasibility of a territorial compromise in the West Bank and Gaza which they captured in their entirety in the Six Day War. But, although the size of the partitioned territory to be allocated to Jews and Arabs has dramatically changed, the nature of the still-unresolved debate — the hardliners' ideological assertions pitted against the would-be compromisers' pragmatic arguments — has remained the same.

As Perlmutter points out, the burden of actually building the foundations of the Jewish state and of carrying it into independence and security was borne almost entirely by the Socialist Zionists. The Revisionists'

underground played a significant role only in 1944-48 when it fiercely fought the British Mandate and the Arabs, while Herut was in power only from 1977-1984, when its mixed record included the peace treaty with Egypt on the one hand and the disastrous Lebanon war on the other. Since 1984, the two blocs have been stalemated in a "national unity" government.

As founder of the Histadrut in 1920, leader of the Socialist Zionists in Palestine from 1930-1948, and Prime Minister of Israel from 1948-1963 (with a brief interlude in 1953-1955), David Ben-Gurion emerges as Israel's chief architect and as a figure of almost mythic proportions. A farmer and political organizer in pre-World War I Palestine, between the two world wars he founded and led the Histadrut as a central force in social, economic, and even security affairs, united several Socialist factions into Mapai, the Israeli Workers Party, which he headed, and formed the Haganah, the main Jewish defense underground in mandate Palestine and forerunner of the formidable Israel Defense Forces. After World War II he led Israel's struggle against the British mandate, in 1948 he formally declared Israel's independence, and, in 1948-49, he led Israel in its war of independence. As Prime Minister he consolidated Israel's state institutions (*Mamlakhtiut*), built up the IDF and, through the 1956 Sinai Campaign, gave Israel eleven years of peace and quiet borders which enabled the state to accumulate enough military, economic, and political strength to achieve the stunning victory of 1967. Despite the enormous contributions of Weizmann and many others to the emergence of Israel, Ben-Gurion was the only Zionist leader "without whom it can be safely said there would be no modern Israel," as Perlmutter correctly observes.

In a brief review it is impossible to do justice to Perlmutter's extensive book, which also deals in great detail with the more familiar post-Ben-Gurion era. Despite the unforgivably large number of annoying typos and factual inaccuracies, as well as some inconsistent, or even internally contradictory, assessments, *Israel* is a useful companion to Sanders' *The High Walls of Jerusalem* and O'Brien's *The Siege*. Perlmutter has given us a solid, informative and incisive study of Israel's modern political history.

Scholarship as a Means Toward Devotion

Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages. Edited by ARTHUR GREEN. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986. 486 pages.

Reviewed by HOWARD A. ADDISON

ONE OF THE major problems facing non-fundamentalist Judaism is the relationship between *Wissenschaft* and devotional study. Unquestionably, the scientific examination of classical Jewish texts has contributed much to our understanding. Philology, form criticism, archeology and the rest of our analytical and comparative tools all have shed light on obscure passages and ideas while deepening our knowledge of the background against which Judaism evolved.

Many, however, feel that this academic analysis of our history, philosophy and texts is not synonymous with *Talmud Torah*. Traditional Torah study has always been more than the gathering of information; it was, and is, an ongoing, life-transforming process leading the Jew towards a more godly life. More than one seminarian has asked whether his professors investigate and teach the *Tanakh* any differently than they might approach the *Koran*. All too often this question is answered with equivocation both by non-observant Jewish scholars and by those who bifurcate their lives between the classroom and the synagogue.

It was, therefore, with great interest that I read *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*. Edited by Arthur Green, this

collection of essays forms the thirteenth volume in a series, *World Spirituality*, published by Crossroad. The purpose of *Jewish Spirituality*, as stated by its editor, is the discovery of how a variety of different Jewish religious types sought to achieve "life in the presence of God." The great contribution of this text is the manner in which its writers used their critical research skills to elucidate the spiritual quest of those ancient and medieval Jewish movements which they describe.

Some of the essays bring to light the spiritual dimension of past institutions and literary ideas in ways that have not been widely disseminated. These illuminating discussions include: Jon Levenson's description of the Temple as God's sacred, enduring microcosm against which the profane, changing, larger world is to be measured and transformed; James Kugel's explanation of how one could offer himself, rather than a bullock or stone carving, to God through psalmody, and Steven Fraade's explication of the ascetic tension which runs through Judaism. Other articles give life to the historical reality underlying widely acknowledged concepts. Among these are Jacob Neusner's study describing the Pharisaic plan to transform all Israel into a "Kingdom of Priests," and Frank Talmadge's examination of allegory as a tool to make seemingly trivial scriptural passages meet the ethical demands of the moment. Although one could dispute the individual assertions of any given author (I personally have problems with Joseph Dan's view of *Shiur Komah* as being anti-anthropomorphic), the strength of the volume as a whole is that most writers did not stop at analyzing an epoch or text. Instead, they went

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deeper and further in presenting the context and spiritual thrust of the subjects under consideration.

For those seeking to reconcile *Wissenschaft* and *Talmud Torah*, the methodology underlying *Jewish Spirituality* is highly instructive. Rather than merely seeking to understand the dating or structure or primary meaning of a given passage, we can use our critical tools to understand the overarching spiritual quest which that *perek* or *sugya* exemplifies. After such studies we then can proceed to apply our knowledge to the present Jewish condition. The essays in *Jewish Spirituality* alone suggest a host of such discussions including: How one can offer himself to God through prayer; the modern synagogue as replica of God's perfected world;

the role of Jewish asceticism in a materialist, consumer society; contemporary preaching as allegory; the Pharisees as a model for a new Jewish synthesis. Such an approach to Jewish study can prove to be both informative and transformative, providing food for the mind and soul at the same time.

Jewish Spirituality bears witness to the fact that critical study and devotional study need not be mutually exclusive. Rather than being a methodology of detachment, *Wissenschaft* can be used as a path to "life in the presence of God," explaining the past, illuminating the present and informing the future. Contemporary Talmud Torah can, indeed, be both historically correct and existentially true.

Another View of Jesus

The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew. By PHILIP SIGAL. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986. xi + 269. \$23.75.

Reviewed by GERARD S. SLOYAN

THIS STUDY IS put forward as the first of many that are needed on the *halakhah* of Mark and Luke, John, Paul and James, as also of Matthew, beyond the *halakhoth* of divorce and the Sabbath to which the author confines himself. He sees in the Jesus of history, unencumbered by a christology which keeps believers in him from seeing the halakhic teacher that he was, a proto-rabbi — the author's term for the *hakhamim* who were active

between the Maccabean period and the emergence of the academy at *Yabneh*. Jesus, while one of them, was not a follower of Hillel, Shammai or any school, but taught with the independence and creative interpretation of Torah which marked proto-rabbis generally. He may have been influenced in his youth by the interpretations of Qumran, either via John the Baptist or directly, but he was, above all, not a *Pharisaaios*, the general pejorative term of the New Testament for separatist-pietists.

These are the *perushim* of Hebrew literature for Sigal, a variety of extremists which included Essenes, Qumranites and Zealots, among others. He does not balk at the gospels' description of them as "hypocrites." Their exaggerated zeal for observance means for him that the current tendency to identify the Pharisees as the intellectual forebears of the Rabbis (who opted, in general, for leniency and going beyond the boundaries of

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the law) is wrong. The other proto-rabbis were as set as Jesus was against the heavy burdens which the *Pharisaioi* would impose by their literal or otherwise restrictive interpretations of Torah.

In his teaching on the *halakhah* of divorce and of the Sabbath, as reported by Matthew (5:32 and 19:9; 12:1-8, 9-13, 14), Jesus conducted himself as one in the rabbinic mainstream even though his stringency on divorce — more lenient than that of Qumran in Sigal's view — did not prevail in the settlements of Yabneh. Jesus agreed with the Qumranites in opposing polygamy, which continued in practice for several centuries.

Sigal does not find form-critical studies of the gospels congenial, preferring the view of Gerhards-son and some contemporary Jewish students of the gospels that the teaching of Jesus is largely available despite some church editing. He sees in Jesus a halakhist who admits some elements of *ʿaggadah* in his teaching. The gospels, however, depict him as a storyteller and epigrammatist who dealt with legal questions only when challenged. Since the author's concentration is on the Matthean divorce and Sabbath passages, he should be allowed his main concern. He argues that Jesus forbids divorce except for adultery (only). Matthew's preposition (5:32) and adverbial phrase (19:9) invariably connote "except," while the *porneia*, "sexual immorality," of both phrases can only mean *moikheia*, "adultery," not the illicit marital unions (*ʿervah*) of Lev. 18:6-18, as Fitzmyer and others hold. Sigal does not explore Jesus' unqualified prohibition of divorce in Mark, Luke and Paul, probably thinking it a suppression of his Jewish teaching for promulgation among the gentiles. In treating the discussions of "what was said to the men of old" and Jesus' teaching in Matthew

5:21-48, Sigal finds neither abrogation nor antithesis, only the proto-rabbinic position of going beyond the accepted precept. Hence, he not surprisingly approves the surpassing righteousness taught in 5:20. In this Jesus was like other proto-rabbis who used Jesus' phrase in Hebrew, "but I say to you," as they cited Scripture against Scripture and made a choice. Whether Deuteronomy 24:1, which allows a man to dismiss his wife for "something indecent" (Sigal thinks the Hebrew phrase not translatable with certainty), can be characterized as expendable *halakhah* on rabbinic terms is a question for readers more learned than this reviewer.

Jesus' healings on the Sabbath likewise fell under the proto-rabbinic teaching that it was permitted to act beneficially on that day. Only those who held to the *perushite* purity taboos, his opponents in Matthew (12:10, 14), could have faulted him.

We have no way to state with certainty that healing, later prohibited as *toladah* [derivative activity; 1521 of them were enumerated two centuries later] was actually forbidden in Jesus' time except by Pharisees, that is, the *perushim*, the pious separatists. Jesus opposed their stringency (p. 140).

In the passage on the plucking of grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-8; in Lk 6:1 the disciples rubbed it), Jesus resorts to the hermeneutical principle *kal vehomer* (v. 6) but not before using *hekesh*, the rule of juxtaposing two persons and situations, as he cited David's eating of the holy bread (vv. 3-4), and the principle that the cult supersedes the Sabbath, as he reminded his challengers that the priests do no wrong in performing in the temple acts customarily considered violations (v. 5). The "light and heavy" application follows: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (v. 6), followed by Jesus' quotation of Hosea 6:6 where the

LORD prefers *hesed* (consistently rendered “love” by Sigal) to sacrifice. The section ends with a declaration that, “Man is lord of the sabbath,” a translation of the words “the son of man” which precludes any christological intent.

This summary of the book’s main argument may obscure the fact that more than half of the text is devoted to the stages in the formation of rabbinic *halakhah* and proto-rabbinic halakhic activity. The author claims to know the problems of dating rabbinic texts but his four-page discussion says, in effect, “Why could not everything taught in Jesus’ day go back to Simeon the Righteous (3d c. B.C.E.) or the two Josis (2d c.)?” Every attribution of teaching to a

pre-Yabneh sage is taken at face value.

Rabbi Sigal has, in fact, made a good case that the halakhic teaching attributed to Jesus in Matthew is in the spirit of Johanan ben Zakkai’s “love commandment” (as he calls his espousal of Hosea 6:6). The approach of this recently deceased scholar to rabbinic history through the teaching of Jesus may ensure it that his identification of the Pharisees and the proto-rabbis and their diametrically opposed teaching receives no critical response. This would be unfortunate, for he has some important things to say. The evidently unproofread text will, at the same time, not draw meticulous scholars to consider his opinions soon.

BOOKS RECEIVED

April 1987 through June 1987

Listing of a book does not preclude its being reviewed in a subsequent issue of JUDAISM

Alphabet

Kipniss, Levin. *The Hebrew Alphabet*. New York: Adama Books, 1987. \$9.95.

American Jewish Life

Rosovsky, Nitza. *The Jewish Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987. iv + 108 pp. (paper).

Tivnon, Edward. *The Lobby*. Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987. 304 pp., \$19.95.

Autobiography and Biography

Adler, Larry. *It Ain't Necessarily So*. An Autobiography. New York: Grove Press, 1987. xix + 222 pp. \$17.95.

Cheng, Hien. *Life and Death in Shanghai*. New York: Grove Press, 1987. 547 pp., \$19.95.

Gies, Miep. *Anne Frank Remembered*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987. 252 pp., \$17.95.

Hammer, Armand. *Hammer*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987. 544 pp., \$22.95.

Perlmutter, Amos. *The Life and Times of Menahem Begin*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1987. 444 pp., \$21.95.

Teveth, Shabtai. *Ben-Gurion*. The Burning Ground, 1886-1948. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. xix + 967 pp., \$35.00.

Bible

Sarna, Nahum M. *Exploring Exodus*. The Heritage of Biblical Israel. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. xii + 277 pp., \$8.95 (paper).

Canadian Jewry

Brown, Michael. *Jew or Juif?* Jews, French Canadians and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914. Philadelphia: JPS, 1987. xii + 356 pp.

Christianity and Jewish/Christian Relations

Lachs, Samuel Tobias. *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*. Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1987. xxix + 468 pp., \$16.95 (paper).

Mayer, Egon. *Love and Tradition*. Marriage Between Jews and Christians. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. 311 pp., \$8.95 (paper).

Pawlikowski, John T. and James A. Wilde. *When Catholics Speak About Jews*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, 1987. vii + 80 pp., \$5.95 (paper).

Segal, Alan F. *Rebecca's Children*. Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986. viii + 207 pp.

European Jewry

Wertheimer, Jack. *Unwelcome Strangers*. East European Jews in Imperial Germany. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987. ix + 275 pp., \$29.95.

Falashas

Leslau, Wolf, tr. *Falasha Anthology*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987. xl + 222 pp. \$10.95 (paper).

Family

Angel, Marc D. *The Orphaned Adult*. Confronting the Death of a Parent. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1987. 162 pp., \$19.95.

Green, Alan S. *A Celebration of Marriage*. New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1987. xiv + 113 pp., \$6.95 (paper).

Festschriften and Yearbooks

Central Conference of American Rabbis. *Yearbook*. Volume XCVI. New York: CCAR, 1987. x + 453 pp.

Gelber, Mark H. *Identity and Ethos*. A Festschrift for Sol Liptzin on the Occasion of his 85th Birthday. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 1987. 412 pp. \$42.00 (paper).

Hebrew Union College Annual. Vol. LVII. Cincinnati: HUC-JIR, 1987, 298 pp.

Fiction

Aleichem, Sholom. *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*. Tr. Hillel Halkin. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. xl + 309 pp., \$19.95.

Klein, A.M. *Short Stories*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987. xxv + 338 pp. \$14.50 (paper).

Labovitz, Annette and Eugene. *Time for My Soul*. A Treasury of Jewish Stories for our Holy Days. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1987. xx + 427 pp., \$30.00.

Weisman, John. *Blood Cries*. New York: Viking Press, 1987. 338 pp., \$17.95.

History

Cohen, Shaye J.D. *From The Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987. 251 pp.

Holocaust

Cohen, Richard I. *The Burden of Conscience: French Jewish Leadership During the Holocaust*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987. xii + 237 pp., \$27.50.

- Fishman, Jack. *Long Knives and Short Memories*. New York: Richardson & Steinman, 1987. 474 pp., \$22.50.
- Gilbert, Martin. *The Holocaust*. A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War. New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1987. 959 pp., \$12.95 (paper).
- Rudavsky, Joseph. *To Live With Hope, To Die With Dignity*. Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1987. 253 pp., \$14.75 (paper).
- Sable, Martin. *Holocaust Studies*. A Directory and Bibliography of Bibliographies. Greenwood, Fla.: Penkevill Pub. Co., 1987. 115 pp., \$20.00.

Israel

- Kahane, Meir. *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews*. Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987. 324 pp., \$18.00.
- Lev, Avraham. *Bazak Guide to Israel, 1987-88*. Dist. by Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1987. 467 pp., \$12.95 (paper).
- Sachar, Howard M. *A History of Israel*. Vol. II. From the Aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987. xiii + 319 pp., \$19.95.
- Yariv, Avner. *Dilemmas of Security*. Politics, Strategy and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987. xii + 355 pp., \$24.95.

Jewish Literature

- Lazarus, Emma. *My Epistle to the Hebrews*. New York: Jewish Historical Society of New York, 1987. xvii + 109 pp., \$10.00 (paper).

Juvenile

- Cohen, Barbara. *First Fast*. New York: UAHC Press, 1987. \$7.95.
- Nathan, Joan. *The Children's Jewish Holiday Kitchen*. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. xiii + 127 pp., \$10.95 (paper).
- Rosenblum, Richard. *My Sister's Wedding*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1987. 32 pp., \$10.25.

Karaites

- Nemoy, Leon, tr. *Karaite Anthology*. Excerpts from the Early Literature. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987. xxvi + 412 pp., \$15.95 (paper).

Literary Criticism

- Feldman, Yael S. *Modernism and Cultural Transfer*. Gabriel Preil and the Tradition of Jewish Literary Bilingualism. Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1986. xii + 224 pp., \$25.00.
- Fuchs, Esther. *Israeli Mythogynies*. Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1987. viii + 147 pp.

Maimonides

Minkin, Jacob S. *The Teachings of Maimonides*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987. xiv + 448 pp., \$40.00.

Mysticism

Gutwirth, Israel. *The Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1987. 288 pp. \$17.95.

Wippler, Migne G. *A Kabbalah for the Modern World*. St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1987. xv + 227 pp., \$7.95 (paper).

Philosophy

Eckardt, A. Roy. *For Righteousness' Sake*. Contemporary Moral Philosophies. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987. 365 pp., \$29.95.

Levy, Ze'ev. *Between Yafeth and Shem*. On the Relationship Between Jewish and General Philosophy. New York: Peter Lang, 1987. x + 253 pp., \$40.90.

Reines, Alvin J. *Polydoxy*. Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1987. 219 pp., \$22.95.

Religion

Gordon, Haim and Leonrd Grob, eds. *Education For Peace*. Testimonies From World Religions. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987. vii + 240 pp.

Jackson, Jesse W. *Straight From the Heart*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. xxv + 324 pp., \$18.95.

Theology

Cohon, Samuel S. *Essays in Jewish Theology*. Cincinnati, Ohio: HUC Press, 1987. xiv + 366 pp., \$29.50.

Zionism

Rubinstein, Amnon. *The Zionist Dream Revisited*. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. xix + 204 pp., \$8.95 (paper).

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